



**Yale College
Center for International & Professional Experience**

**Amy Chang
Trumbull College, Class of 2016
John Heinz Class of 1960 Government Service Fellowship
United States**

Internship in the Immediate Office of the Secretary at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Interning this summer in the Immediate Office of the Secretary (IOS) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in Washington, D.C. was a deeply rewarding experience that helped me to develop a holistic understanding of federal operations and interagency work, gave me access to resources and officials who could speak on material directly relevant to my interests, and, most importantly, honed my sense of my future career goals and what I want my future work environment to look like.

At the outset of my internship, I had a very nebulous sense of what public policy work actually entailed. Most of my exposure to policy in the past has been focused on the grassroots implementation level, through work with domestic and international NGOs. I was curious to see first-hand what the policy creation and regulatory processes look like at the federal level of government.

Being in the Office of the Chief of Staff of IOS was perfect for addressing my interest in understanding federal operations. Though the majority of material passing to the Secretary did not originate in the Office of the Chief of Staff, it did pass through the office, providing such a unique vantage point for how the numerous operating and staff divisions came together to run the department. I was surprised by the sheer size of the department—comprised of 17 staff divisions and 11 operating divisions (including the major agencies of CMS, FDA, CDC, and NIH)—which made this department's work even more herculean and made even more valuable my perspective from sitting in IOS.

My tasks largely changed day to day, and I quickly learned that an essential aspect of successful work in government is to be flexible and always ready to pick up an impromptu assignment. Moreover, essential is being able to find ways to streamline process flows, because even minute changes can be the difference between making and missing rollouts. I realized that deadlines can become unexpectedly tight because of the layers of approval required before a document's release. While frustrating at times to deal with, the bureaucratic challenges were something I was happy to be exposed to and had actually hoped to better understand when I came into the internship. It was revealing to see first-hand that so much of the bureaucracy was completely necessary. Especially in an organization as large as HHS, it's difficult for a singular office to be able to see all aspects of an issue and its relevance to the department.

One of the things I loved was that the most seemingly mundane tasks often turned out to be the most interesting, in terms of exposing me to health, drug, and trade policies and negotiations I would not otherwise have realized were in place. For example, one of my constant tasks was to update a document tracker in real-time, as letters to the Secretary—often responding to governors, Congressional members, and other stakeholders—passed in and out of the office through various levels of approval. Although the task itself was little more than filling excel spreadsheet fields, it kept me acutely up-to-date on the successes and challenges of various HHS-led policy and program rollouts. Similarly, another task I received was putting together a binder of materials for the Secretary's participation in the World Health Assembly. Though another fundamentally simple task, it allowed me to see with which countries we held bilateral meetings and what the key subjects of discussion were.

Beyond the small tasks embedded in daily operations, it was incredibly rewarding to play a main role in large projects where the end deliverables went straight to the Secretary or to the White House. Hearings preparation was a key component of my time at HHS. In order to ensure that the Secretary and other department officials were aware of stakeholders' positions and to provide foundational material for hearing preparation, I helped to create member profiles and compile issues briefs that became the Secretary's base of reference. I also had the opportunity to prepare the entirety of an issues backgrounder for a cabinet meeting, and it was rewarding to see that it not only went to the White House meeting but was also repurposed for grassroots level use. It gave me the valuable chance to play a supporting role in and learn at the intersection of multiple sectors of society: from government to grassroots to private businesses.

The amount of responsibility and simultaneous freedom of execution I received as just an intern gave me a clear positive example of what I want in a long-term work environment. HHS impressed me because of how open the environment was to new perspectives and how readily it eschewed preconceptions based on seniority—there were an astounding number of young people in positions of high responsibility—and I found this to be an admirable quality of work in the federal government.

In a similar vein, one of my other key takeaways from my summer experience came from outside the bounds of my work at HHS. It was realizing the wealth of knowledge and ideas that DC had to offer. While I had previously thought DC to be drab, having the chance to immerse myself in the environment for ten weeks allowed me to appreciate the city for how engaged its citizens are. I fell in love with the constant mental stimulation I felt and the sheer number of outlets there were for exploring diverse academic, political, and cultural interests. Every evening, there was a talk to attend or discussion to be had. From this, I learned to navigate an intensely professional environment. I realized that people are always happy to sit down and share their thoughts and insights on a variety of subjects. Many of my best memories from the summer are of coffee chats with people, either at HHS or outside, who I had never previously met or been introduced to. In this environment, I came to set aside personal inhibitions about reaching out to others, and I became more comfortable and confident in my interactions with higher-level professionals.

After this summer, I now better understand the capacity of and limits to work in the government. On a professional level, I have gained an understanding of how multiple departmental divisions, agencies, and sectors of society come together to create and implement policy. On a more personal level, I have a much clearer idea of what I am looking for in and how best to navigate a professional environment.

I want to thank the Class of 1960 for granting me the John Heinz Government Service Fellowship and helping me to deepen both my understanding of and commitment to work in government service. Without the support of this fellowship, none of my professional or personal growth, which definitively made this summer my most formative yet, would have been possible.