

Ann Marie Smetona

U.S. Department of State – U.S. Embassy Bern

This summer, I interned with the U.S. Department of State at the U.S. Embassy in Bern, Switzerland for ten weeks. What set this internship experience apart from many typical internships was that I was given legitimate assignments that regular employees perform instead of busywork. As such, I was able to develop a much more realistic understanding of what life in the Foreign Service is truly like. While I was exposed to all the general functions of the Embassy, I was placed in the consular section, which processes visa and passport applications and provides general services to American citizens. Since one of the current ambassador's main goals is to increase Swiss foreign direct investment in the United States, one of my assignments was to create a PowerPoint presentation explaining the various types of U.S. business and investor visas designed to attract Swiss investors. In the process, I gained a deep level of familiarity with the purposes and requirements of numerous visa categories. Another major project was creating a list of recommendations for Americans travelling to Switzerland which was published on Embassy Bern's website. Advice ranged from practical information on visa requirements to suggestions for tourist activities in Switzerland.

Most of my time was spent working with the consular section's Fraud Prevention Unit. My favorite assignment was writing a cable – an internal, State Department report – analyzing trends among people who applied for visas at Embassy Bern to study English in the United States. The project was not only intended to uncover trends in potentially fraudulent behavior but to give the State Department a general idea of what types of people study English in the United States.

A very fun and interesting experience was going on a "field trip" to both the United Nations headquarters and the U.S. Mission in Geneva, Switzerland. This is a one-of-a-kind mission since it deals with multilateral relations as opposed to bilateral relations. Not only does Geneva have the United Nations' headquarters, but it also has the headquarters of countless worldwide organizations, and as such, the U.S. has a special delegation to manage its relations with these bodies in Geneva.

One of the best parts of this experience was being able to work very closely with the embassy employees, who were exceptionally friendly, sincere, and helpful, and always encouraged me to ask questions. I was very much a part of the team and attended all meetings like a regular employee. During the internship, I was able to witness life in the Foreign Service and learn more than I would have imagined about the functions of the State Department and our strong relationship with Switzerland. Additionally, I was able to travel throughout Switzerland and see what the beautiful country has to offer. I can truly say that this was the best experience of my life thus far, and I highly recommend this internship program. Moreover, none of this would have been possible without the Wellman Hill Grant and Elizabeth Hill's generosity, to which I am indescribably grateful.