



RAPPAPORT CENTER
FOR LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY

BOSTON COLLEGE | LAW

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Chris McDonough: Natural Fit

There are days, Chris McDonough admits with a smile, that the law school grind isn’t exactly ideal for a young family.

Sometimes, amid those miserable, long hours of studying, the idea of his old job, working from home, and the accompanying layer of financial security for Chris, his wife Joanna and 4-month-old daughter Lucy, seemed darned good.

But it’s a fleeting thought, and one that invariably gives way to the recent memory of his Rappaport summer and the certainty that he’s just where he is supposed to be.

“You know, I actually liked my old career, and it would be way, way easier to have two salaries right now,” said the 32-year-old. “But this summer reaffirmed that this is what I want to be doing.”

The path Chris took to Northeastern University School of Law and the Rappaport Fellowship is uniquely devoid of any specific policy mission or long-standing lawyering goal. Rather, it was a simple self-acknowledgement during his prior career in software development project management that he had a skill set that might lend itself to bigger things.

“I really liked the problem solving and interpersonal aspects of working on a software development team,” he said. “But the things I liked about it and was good at weren’t necessarily dependent on software, so I wondered if it could be done in a context that was more geared toward the public good.”

He remembers now a comment from Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu made during a Rappaport Summer Series event – the reason we need government is that there are things that can be done collectively that cannot be done individually – and it reminds him of his motivation for law school.

“I have always believed in the power and responsibility of government to improve people’s lives,” Chris said. “I wanted to contribute to that work.”

And on the other hand, “I had literally no experience or connections in that world.”

Enter Northeastern, with its aggressive internship schedule and then, in the summer before his final year, the Rappaport Fellowship. For a North Shore native interested in pursuing a career in state or local government, it was an ideal opportunity.

The Rappaport Center “exposed me to a whole community passionate about public policy and government in Massachusetts,” Chris said. “I was thrilled. It was a natural fit.”

His placement with the City of Boston Law Department gave Chris an insider’s look at the range of legal issues encountered by city governments, everything from constitutional challenges to insurance claims for damaged city property.

His two previous internships had been at the state level – the State House and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection – so the Rappaport internship gave him a chance to experience government at the more local level.

Another highlight was the Rappaport weekly speaker series. “To get a chance to listen and ask questions of people like Rachael Rollins and Michelle Wu – people on the front lines of the fight for justice in the state – was inspiring,” he said. “It made me want to get out there and join their ranks.”

– Dave Cummings
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