

HLS Summer Theory Institute
for Students Practicing Public Interest Law
Information and Application, Summer 2008

The Institute:

Harvard Law School's Summer Theory Institute is a summer workshop for HLS students with public interest internships in New York City. The Institute will include between 10 and 12 student fellows who will meet with the facilitators one evening a week to discuss works of social and critical theory as they relate to the fellows' public interest work. At each session, the group will engage with a different set of short theoretical readings, each focused around a theme (e.g., economic justice, women's rights) that relates to the students' public interest work. While the readings will be tailored to the specific interests of the group, the readings will include works by thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Franz Fanon, Edmund Burke, and Judith Butler.

The mission of the Institute is to infuse excitement, innovation and sustainability into the student fellows' first experiences practicing public interest law full-time. Working together to think through the role that theory can play in legal practice and activism will allow the fellows to engage more meaningfully with their organizations' methods of pursuing justice on a day-to-day basis. By creating the space to discuss larger theoretical concepts outside of the work environment, the Institute will enhance the fellows' senses of the potential for intellectual rigor and personal fulfillment in public interest work. In the end, the Institute will aim to create a community of future leaders who will bring their enthusiasm for pursuing social change through the law back to the HLS community at the end of the summer.

The Summer Theory Institute will involve a serious commitment on the part of the student fellows. They will be asked to attend all ten evening sessions, prepare for each group meeting ahead of time, participate in the discussions, and lead one week's discussion. In return, the Institute will provide them with a stipend to supplement their summer public interest funding. In addition, if any of the fellows are interested in reflecting more formally on the relationship between theory and their summer public interest experiences, the Institute will help connect them to HLS professors who would be willing to supervise larger writing projects for law school credit when they return to HLS.

How to participate:

If you are a 1L or 2L interested in becoming a fellow of the HLS Summer Theory Institute, please submit a statement of interest **by April 4, 2008**. Statements should be emailed to **jocelynsimonson@post.harvard.edu** and **agarwal@post.harvard.edu**. In your statement of interest, please explain (1) your anticipated or desired internship plans for the summer and (2) your interest in the Summer Theory Institute.

No experience with social or critical theory is necessary to participate. Instead, we are looking for a group of fellows who are excited about public interest work and open to thinking in innovative and sometimes critical ways about that work. While we understand that HLS students may not finalize their summer plans until after the application deadline, all fellows will eventually be required to secure a summer internship with a public interest organization in New York City. Please do not hesitate to contact Jocelyn and Nisha if you have any questions about the Institute.

About the Facilitators:

The 2008 HLS Summer Theory Institute will be facilitated by Nisha Agarwal and Jocelyn Simonson, the founders of the Institute.

Nisha Agarwal is a Skadden Fellow at the New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI), where her work focuses on community-based advocacy to reduce racial & ethnic disparities in health care.

Jocelyn Simonson is a public defender at the Bronx Defenders, Inc. Before joining the Bronx Defenders, she was a judicial clerk for Judge B.D. Parker on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York.

Nisha and Jocelyn both graduated from HLS in 2006, where Nisha was Vice-President for Membership of the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau and Jocelyn was an Editor-in-Chief of the *Harvard Civil Rights Civil Liberties Law Review*. Nisha and Jocelyn have been collaborating with each other since their third year of law school as they explore ways to bridge the theory-practice divide in the world of public interest law. In New York, they lead a regular “theory workshop” consisting of practitioners from a variety of fields. Nisha and Jocelyn have also coordinated smaller theory discussions with public interest practitioners who work within their respective fields of immigration advocacy and public defense.

Publications that have grown from these experiences include a forthcoming article by Nisha in the *Fordham Urban Law Journal* on the theory and practice of community health planning, and an article by Jocelyn reconceptualizing employment discrimination against individuals with criminal records, which was published in the *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy* last year.