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## Law School News: Rewards Of The Road Less Traveled

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October 13, 2022

# *Law School News*

## Rewards of the Road Less Traveled

Mike Smitsky '15 needed law students to help with legal work for a transportation trade union—so he partnered with his alma mater to create an internship perfect for the school's Semester-in-Practice program.

October 13, 2022

| Michelle Choate



Mike Smitsky '15, Dylan Collins '22

After five-plus years working for the Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI), Mike Smitsky '15 was eager to share the benefits of his experience with students from his alma mater.

As the world's largest nonprofit dedicated to the advancement of uncrewed systems and robotics, AUVSI gives those involved the chance to take part in changing how the world looks at transportation and technology, Smitsky explains. But he knew that the idea of working for a

trade association like AUVSI did not necessarily top the list of preferred jobs for most law students—and he wanted to change that. So he approached RWU Law and proposed an internship that was a perfect fit for the school’s [Semester-in-Practice](#) practice, an experiential innovation that enables students to train full-time, either in one of the school’s pre-established local placements or in an approved remote placement of their choosing.

Dylan Collins ’22 ended up being a perfect fit for the AUVSI internship. As a 3L at the end of 2021, he had completed all of his required credits and was looking to gain some real-world experience to complement his studies. In addition, the chance to intern under the supervision of a young alum like Smitsky was an opportunity that just seemed too good pass up.

“Mike is not only an alum of RWU Law, he’s an alum of the Semester-in-Practice program—so he knew how to tailor the internship to provide the greatest amount of value to me as an intern,” says Collins. “Plus, he does a lot of work on drone technology, of which I’m a big fan, so I thought working on that would be awesome.”

When Collins arrived in Washington, DC, in early 2022 to begin his internship, Smitsky was confident that the experience would offer even more than Collins had hoped for in terms of hands-on, valuable work.

“At a trade association like AUVSI, you represent hundreds of members of a particular industry and their organizations,” Smitsky explains. “You have to develop consensus and liaise with key government and congressional offices. You have to execute a well-crafted strategy and make sure you have kept your constituency and your members happy.”

Collins’ expectations were indeed met—and exceeded. He had expected to be doing lots of legal writing and research, but not to be working directly with Federal Aviation Administration officials, as well as state politicians and governors, correlating legislation regarding flight space, drone flying, and other endeavors of great interest to AUVSI.

“We dealt with big-name companies such as Amazon, Boeing, UPS, and FedEx; and with many levels of government, both state and federal,” Collins says, “I got to meet with many of the big players from each side. I didn’t expect to meet as many people as I did, but it was invaluable. I did some great relationship-building and made connections that will be helpful for years to come.

“At all the places I interned with before, I was just doing the legal work and giving it to my supervisor,” he adds. “This position allowed me to see many sides of the industry and the environment in which it operates—to roll up my sleeves and be a part of it.”

Adds Smitsky, “Dylan developed personal relationships with legislators throughout the country. He has their cell phone numbers, and was relaying about strategy to them. He was representing an entire industry to a variety of sectors. And he now has relationships within many organizations that are doing innovative work. I think it’s a great way to jump-start your career and develop credibility.”

Without hesitation, Collins says he would recommend working with the AUVSI—and RWU Law’s Semester-in-Practice in general—to other law students.

“The networking experiences you get and the relationships you make are invaluable,” says Collins. “It’s also a great chance to apply the concepts you’ve been learning in class to the real world. You learn even more on the job.”

Smitsky, too, found the experience highly rewarding, and is eager to welcome a new intern next spring. For him, the Semester-in-Practice practice with AUVSI is all about providing opportunities for RWU Law students, while opening their eyes to a fulfilling career path that they may not previously have considered.

“We hope that law students are energized by the experience of working here, toward a greater good that has measurable results,” Smitsky says. “If we get autonomous technologies integrated to the airspace or the roads or navigable waterways, we can really change the way the entire world looks. Those are the kinds of issues we tackle here in DC, and particularly within our trade association. By the end of his time with us, Dylan could really see the tangible impact of the work he did here. And it will be the same for any other students who work with us.”