Our Newest Alumni

Four graduates reflect the Class of 2005’s wide-ranging interests and bright futures.

by Betsy Rogers

When Matthew Coward decided to go to law school, his aunt sent him a faded 1973 newspaper clipping about his great-uncle, a lawyer in Guyana, his mother’s home country. “The article said he was called ‘the poor man’s lawyer’ and known as the attorney in Guyana who helped all the poor people,” Coward says. “That really touched me.”

A native of Ontario, Canada, Coward had majored in economics at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He went to work for a Toronto retailer, helping the company develop strategies to compete with newly arrived big-box stores. He then spent four years as a financial analyst at ConocoPhillips. So when he came to Washington University, Coward gravitated toward corporate law classes. And he has now joined the 375-attorney Texas firm of Locke Liddell & Sapp, putting his accounting background and his business law training to work for corporate clients.

Alongside these career plans, however, runs a deepening interest in criminal law and public policy, sparked by the law school’s Criminal Justice Clinic, where students provide legal aid to indigent clients. Coward, who already had distinguished himself in client counseling competitions, says the clinic gave him unparalleled real-world experience. “It was better than any competition,” he observes. “I worked with real-life clients with real problems.”

The clinic exposed Coward to “the human side” of the law. Though many clients were innocent and eventually cleared of their criminal charges, he says, the charges and prosecution could shatter their worlds. “They lost their jobs, their apartments. Their lives were ruined.”

He found the clinic was “the most invaluable experience of law school. It was very eye-opening.” Coward says the clinic showed him the failings in the criminal justice system. Finding that drugs are involved in most criminal cases, he concluded that criminal prosecution is not the optimal way to handle drug users. “These people aren’t so...
much criminals as addicts,” he observes. “They need an alternative.” Further, many hapless defendants have little education, so the prospects of building a better life in the aftermath of criminal prosecution are poor.

His clinic experience has sparked an interest in public policy. “There’s only so much you can do once a person is in that situation,” he admits. “If you get them out, they’ll go back to the same situation. Can we change the policies that are putting people there to begin with?” Politics, he readily acknowledges, intrigues him.

Coward feels fortunate that he had the opportunity to attend Washington University, looking back on his law school experience with gratitude—“for its challenges and revelations, for the unconditional support and love of my wife, and for the great friends I made.”

Sara Lawlyes, JD ’05

As an intern at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, Sara Lawlyes found the justice system struggling, often counterproductively, with human problems. She also encountered inspiring heroism. “You meet all kinds of amazing people with these horrible stories,” she says. “But they keep their chins up and keep struggling, and some do have successes.”

Lawlyes remembers one woman in particular. This client had earned her GED, was taking college classes, and aspired to run a day-care center. But she could not afford medication for her son, who suffers from bipolar disorder. One day, when he was uncontrollable, she took him to an emergency center, where he was given prescription drugs. The staff then wanted to send him home without medication, so she decided to leave him there instead. For that, she was charged with neglect.

“‘This mom was incredible,’” Lawlyes says. “On her own, she researched and found a program that would help medicate and counsel her son.” She finally was able to take her son home, and Lawlyes persuaded the authorities to expunge the neglect charge. “That could have turned into a disaster, where she lost her son, her livelihood, her dreams for a day-care center, and maybe her other children.”

Lawlyes lives her commitment to helping others. After earning a bachelor’s degree in government from the University of Virginia and a master’s in elementary education from Johns Hopkins University, she volunteered with Teach for America in Baltimore. The neighborhood was dangerous, and the school deeply troubled. “I was definitely outside my comfort zone,” Lawlyes admits. But she loved the work and stayed four years instead of two. She continues to serve the organization as a regional alumni coordinator.

In law school she devoted many hours to community service. She served three years on the Public Service Advisory Board, matching students with volunteer openings. She arranged events where attorneys and faculty discussed pro bono projects. She organized holiday “giving trees,” Relay For Life teams to raise money for breast cancer research, and fundraising efforts to support stipends for public interest law internships. In acknowledgment, she received Washington University’s Gerry and Bob Virgil Ethic of Service Award and the law school’s Jack Garden Humanitarian Award.

Now she’s working for the United States Air Force as part of the Presidential Management Fellows Program. Designed to recruit top graduate students into civil service, this program trains people to become leaders of executive agencies. She is working as a contract specialist at Los Angeles Air Force Base. “I like doing new and different things,” she says.

Looking ahead, she says she would love to combine her law training with community organizing, direct client contact, and recruiting others into public service. “My ideal job,” she says, “would be some kind of community center where I could do all of that.”
Volunteer Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts, which helps arts organizations incorporate as nonprofit agencies. The volunteers write articles of incorporation and by-laws, and fill out federal and state tax forms for the groups. An attorney-supervisor provides backup and checks documents. Lydigsen worked with a St. Louis immigrant group, the Red Sea Eritrean Community Center, and with the St. Louis Blues Museum Foundation.

Lydigsen’s accomplishments inside and outside the classroom brought her numerous recognitions. She won the Joseph Kutten Prize in bankruptcy, awarded to the third-year student with the highest grade in bankruptcy studies; the Samuel M. Breckinridge Book Award for excellence in legal research and writing; and a Judge Samuel M. Breckinridge Practice Court prize for excellence in moot court competitions. She also won the Midwest Regional round of the Giles Rich Moot Court Competition.

After her clerkship, Lydigsen hopes to put these strengths to work in intellectual property litigation. She would like to join an intellectual property law firm or a larger firm with an IP department. She plans to take the Illinois bar exam and is considering Chicago, originally her hometown, as a place to live and work.

Lydigsen found Washington University very much to her liking. She was amazed at her IP professors’ dedication and accessibility. And in many law schools, she observes, cutthroat competition prevails among students. “There’s not such a competitive feel” to Washington University, she says. “People really enjoy each other. It’s a great school.”
Andres Pacheco, LLM ’05

With a revolution taking place in Chile’s criminal justice system, Chilean attorney Andres Pacheco decided to hone his skills for the new procedures through the LLM program in United States law at Washington University.

“We used to have an inquisitorial system, with written procedure only. Now we’ve changed to an adversarial procedure, and that means oral hearings. You challenge the other guy immediately before the court,” he explains. “If you truly want to understand how lawyers work in oral proceedings, you need to come to the United States.”

Pacheco’s home is Concepción, Chile’s second-largest city, with 1.5 million residents and 10 universities. He is a partner in one law firm there and a junior partner in a second, practicing both criminal and banking law. He also teaches criminal law at one university and instructs police officers in the new criminal procedures at a second.

The judicial reform under way in Chile has been difficult, he says. “You need to re-educate all the lawyers to give them the skills to use in oral procedures,” he explains.

But in some ways, he believes, Chile is ideally positioned to anticipate future legal issues and avoid problems that have plagued the United States, particularly in white-collar crime. “The U.S. is a more developed society,” he says. “You have better things, but also worse things. Criminals create very complicated new forms of crime.

Enron, WorldCom—this kind of crime is completely unknown in Chile. We don’t use a lot of electronic devices for storing and transmitting business information.”

But Chile’s rapidly advancing economy requires increasingly careful regulation. And Pacheco hopes to help shape additional legal reform to anticipate new kinds of crime, protecting electronic communications, elucidating lawyers’ roles in investigations, and developing strong laws against obstruction of justice.

For now, Pacheco has a new window into adversarial procedures through his internship in the Washington, D.C., public defender’s office, a rare opportunity for a lawyer from another country.

Pacheco thoroughly enjoyed law school life. He organized the LLM program’s first official Relay For Life team. An ardent soccer fan, he played on a winning intramural team. And he formed fast friendships. “The people are so kind here,” he observes.

Pacheco chose Washington University in part because his wife, Constanza, had been an exchange student in Kansas City and remains close to her exchange family. But he found many advantages to the program itself, especially in the international character of the LLM students. “For the first time in the LLM program,” he notes, “we had students from five continents. I have classmates from Africa, Oceania, Europe, Asia. We learned how systems run in other parts of the world, not just in America. That’s incredible.”