Students Practice Public-Interest Law ... from South Dakota to South Africa

For the past two summers, University law students have volunteered their legal expertise to help American Indians defend their rights. So far, five students have spent the summer at the tribal government headquarters of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, as part of the School of Law’s American Indian Law and Economic Development Program. This “externship,” supervised by Stephen J. Guin, associate professor of law, gives students hands-on experience in policy development, legislative advocacy, and litigation. In summer 2004, students were involved in streamlining the tribe’s collection of laws, which eventually led to the drafting of a single title-based code. They also worked with Gunn, who served as a clerk and tribal attorney with the tribe in the mid-1990s, and attorneys from St. Louis-based Sommerschein Nath & Rosenthal on Bank of Hawai’i Long, a tribal self-governance case. In November 2004, the tribe’s appellate court ruled in their favor, affirming the jurisdiction of the tribal courts over events occurring on the reservation. The case now is on appeal in the federal district court in South Dakota.

This year’s program handled the federal appeals and also dealt with issues of Indian child welfare. Yule Kim, a second-year law student who participated in the 2005 externship, says, “This has been a great opportunity not only to gain experience in litigation and corporate, tax, and constitutional law, but also to work in a congenial, professional environment with enthusiastic, knowledgeable attorneys.”

While the interns navigated the legalities of the tribe, they also immersed themselves in life on a reservation by attending tribal events such as powwows, a commemoration of the Battle of Little Big Horn, and a sundance ceremony.

The American Indian Law and Economic Development Program has received support from the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies at the University’s George Warren Brown School of Social Work, featured performances, cuisines, and exhibitions from around the world, as well as a forum on the immigration experience. The event’s theme was “Crossroads: Celebrating One World.”

Fossils Show Evolution of Facial Features

Some characteristics of the facial features of our ancestors who lived some 2 to 3 million years ago first developed as the result of natural selection—the genetic process that favors survival of the fittest. In that pre-tool, pre-fire era, early humans needed huge jaws to eat dinner, skulls with heavy ridges for jaw muscles to attach to, and large canines to tear the meat. However, about 1 to 2 million years ago, when our genus of apes, Homo, evolved, it split away from that burly look, and developed a petite skull instead. At about the same time, two major developments released the need for natural selection: the creation of tools, beginning with stone tools, used to kill animals and chop them up, and the use of fire to cook the meat.

Recent research by James M. Cheverud, professor of anatomy in the School of Medicine and of physical anthropology in Arts & Sciences, and his colleague and former student Rebecca Rogers Ackermann, Ph.D. ’98, of the University of Cape Town, South Africa, shows there was more than natural selection at work at the time. “Random genetic drift also was at work,” Ackermann says. By making facial measurements on fossils skulls from seven early hominids, and, for comparison, measuring the facial features on skulls of adult humans, gorillas, and chimpanzees, the researchers found that within the genus Homo there was a random pattern of variation. This suggests that genetic drift played a role in the process, Cheverud says, “The relaxing of natural selection, facial diversity was free to increase. Hence the vast differences we see today.”

FRACTRUNNERS

Celebrating One World

Performing as part of the 11th annual International Festival are, from left, Yang Gao, a graduate law student; Huiyuan Shan, whose husband is a doctoral student in physics in Arts & Sciences; and Zihan Huang, graduate teaching and research assistant in chemistry in Arts & Sciences. As members of the Chinese Dance Team, part of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association at the University, they presented Qing Feng Xian Qing, or Breeze and Happiness, a Han folk dance portraying a Chinese town on a sunny spring day. The day-long festival, sponsored by the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, featured performances, cuisines, and exhibitions from around the world, as well as a forum on the immigration experience. The event’s theme was “Crossroads: Celebrating One World.”

Street children in Durban, South Africa, paint a mural during a week-long program led by summer “externs” from the School of Law.

Law students interested in practicing public-interest law also had the opportunity to share their legal expertise in Africa during 11 weeks in summer 2005. Eleven students provided legal assistance to indigent and low-income residents in Durban, South Africa, working with that nation’s new Legal Aid Board and other public-interest law organizations. Another student worked for the International Court for Rwanda, which holds court in Arusha, Tanzania. This was the fourth year for the African externship project, spearheaded by Karen Tokarz, professor of law and director of clinical education and alternative dispute resolution programs, who spent a semester with the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) Campus Law Clinic in Durban in fall 2001. To date, 25 students have spent their summers doing legal work in Africa through this project. Support for the students who choose to work in public-interest law agencies and organizations such as Legal Aid offices in the United States and overseas during the summer comes from the law school’s Summer Public Interest Stipend Program and the Dagens-Legoms International Public Interest Fellowships Fund.

Medical Research Findings … a Mouse-click Away

In light of recent pressure on medical researchers and publishers to make their findings more accessible to the general public, three groups have united to launch a comprehensive informational Web site for persons interested in knowing findings of the latest medical research.

The American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association, and the American Heart Association are currently the main supporters of the project, called patientINFO. The initiative aims to give patients and caregivers free access to the latest medical studies, as well as understandable interpretations of the findings.

Proponents of the project hope that it will help patients have more productive interactions with their physicians and make better-informed health-care decisions. The groups will review hundreds of medical studies published monthly in dozens of journals, then post interpretations from their own experts. The site also will include links to the original studies, which are normally not available by subscription to the journals.

The Web site—www.patientINFO.org—is under construction.

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This 2.5-million-year-old fossil “robust” skull of an Australothoropus africanus from Sterkfontein Caves in South Africa shows how, at that time, natural selection played a major role in determining facial structures.

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