Protecting Rights of Native Americans and Native Hawaiians

STEVEN GUNN, adjunct professor of law and director of the law school’s American Indian Law Summer Program, is a dedicated advocate for native peoples. As a Skadden Fellow at the Indian Law Resource Center in Washington, D.C., following his graduation from Yale Law School, he represented American Indian tribes in actions to protect their lands, resources, and cultures. He has practiced and taught Native American law ever since. Now through Gunn’s program at Washington University, law students have the opportunity to work on behalf of Native Americans in the Dakotas, as well as for Native Hawaiians in the 50th state.

In work that enhances his teaching, Gunn handles cases in which he defends native peoples’ rights. Recently, he testified before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee’s hearing on the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act; appeared on a live television broadcast in Hawaii with the state attorney general and others to discuss the act; and submitted written comments to the Senate and House committees overseeing the legislation.

Although Missouri is no longer home to any federally recognized tribes, rigorous efforts to learn about and protect tribal cultures, resources, and rights continue at Washington University. The Katherine M. Buder Foundation funds the Buder Center for American Indian Studies at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, and the Buder Foundation also provides scholarships for native students to attend the law school and the school of social work. Additionally, Gunn directs and teaches an interdisciplinary course, American Indian Societies, Cultures and Values, along with faculty from many disciplines at the University.

Such work demonstrates the law school’s notable national reach—which influences the caliber of the students’ education, the lawyers they become regardless of the field they choose, and indirectly, the quality of the democracy in which they live.