JUST AS LAW is a profession built on creating and maintaining relationships, the law school’s relationships with its alumni became even more critical during the economic downturn. Alumni support in the form of scholarship aid and Annual Fund contributions, volunteer activities, and student mentoring has long been a stronghold of Washington University School of Law.

During the past year, when the law school reached out to alumni to assist with job placement strategies for specific recent graduates, not surprisingly many were eager to help. Alumni support ranged from considering recent alumni for job openings to providing short-term work for newly minted graduates to reaching out to others within their network to match recent graduates with available opportunities.

“Our placement efforts are now predicated on providing significantly more networking opportunities for each student and identifying possible employers and employment opportunities for each, taking into account the student’s skills and geographic preferences,” says Kent Syverud, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley Distinguished University Professor. “I am deeply grateful to our alumni who have been extraordinarily helpful in this extensive networking effort.”

Members of the law school’s National Council also have been closely involved in expanding the school’s partnership with alumni for placement strategies, including Alan Bornstein, JD ’81; Howard Cayne, JD ’79; Harry Joe, JD ’75; Doug Kelly, JD ’73; Sandra Moore, BA ’76, JD ’79; Cash Nickerson, JD ’85, MBA ’93; Maury Poscover, JD ’69; Andy Puzder, JD ’78; and William Webster, JD ’49. Other alumni who have joined in targeted student employment efforts include Ruth Kim, JD ’84; Charles Seigel, JD ’84; and Marc Wallis, JD ’85.

Nickerson, principal and chief financial officer at PDS Tech Inc. in Irving, Texas, is currently drawing upon his business and management expertise to help the Career Services Office in devising new strategies for assisting incoming students with an in-depth self-assessment process to better hone their career and job search plans.

Christina Romer, former chair of President Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers, to campus for a day-long series of interdisciplinary events, during which law students served as hosts for Romer.

In 2012, CIS built upon the momentum of this visit by organizing a two-day conference on Work and Livable Lives. The conference featured top-level policymakers and scholars presenting papers on panels addressing household financial fragility, the measurement of economic security, the American Dream, labor and employment policy, and health policy and employment. Jared Bernstein, senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and former chief economist and economic policy adviser to Vice President Joseph Biden, delivered the keynote address.

Both the events with Romer and the Work and Livable Lives conference were the outgrowth of a collaboration of centers from schools and disciplines across the university with additional support from the Office of the Provost. Additionally, CIS has received a book contract from Oxford University Press to publish the conference’s papers. The book, Working and Living in the Shadow of Economic Fragility, will be edited by CIS director Marion Crain and Professor Michael Sherraden of the Brown School.

“The center’s long-term goal is to enrich the research and learning of affiliated faculty and their students by connecting them with researchers and policymakers addressing similar problems in other disciplines,” notes Crain, vice provost and the Wiley B. Rutledge Professor of Law.

Alumni Provide Vital Assistance to Students

(below) A growing partnership with alumni is vital to the law school’s support for students, ranging from alumni leading ethics discussion groups during Orientation (pictured below) to sharing advice at networking events, posting projects in the job bank, helping match students with available employment opportunities, and supporting the Annual Fund and Scholarship Initiative.
WHEN LAW STUDENT Jaclyn Tordo, JD ’12, applied to work at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office in spring 2011, she looked forward to being part of the law school’s Congressional & Administrative Law Program, or “D.C. clinic,” in the fall.

But as weeks became months after submitting her résumé and cover letter to HUD, Tordo became concerned. She turned to Susan Kaplan, clinic co-director and senior lecturer in law, for guidance. “Susan referred me to Tenille Washburn at HUD,” Tordo recalls. “Tenille and I exchanged a number of emails, and we soon became acquainted with each other.”

Washburn, JD ’01, was herself a former Washington University D.C. clinical student. She is now assistant general counsel for field management and information technology at the federal agency. After checking with HUD’s Human Resources office, Washburn quickly discovered the problem: the agency was swamped with applications for summer positions, and Tordo was applying for the fall.

“I couldn’t believe that someone at HUD wouldn’t be interested in someone with Jaclyn’s skills and experience,” Washburn says. She then talked about Tordo with Camille Acevedo, associate general counsel for legislation and regulations.

‘Looking forward to my new career’

Immediately after that, I got a call,” Tordo says. “After going through the interview process, I started working for Camille in HUD’s Office of Legislation and Regulations. Associate Dean Tomea Mersmann also mentored me during my time in D.C., helping me to make the most of my experience.”

Co-directed by Kaplan and Mersmann, JD ’91, the clinic is among the oldest legal externship programs in the nation’s capital. Each year, 10–15 percent of the law school’s third-year students participate, gaining valuable experience in public service and government-related legal work.

Tordo says she loved her externship with “Legs and Regs,” as it is affectionately known. In fact, she enjoyed it so much that she decided to apply for HUD’s highly competitive Legal Honors Program. Acceptance in the program would mean full-time work after completing her JD in May 2012. She knew the competition would be fierce: 900 hopeful students had submitted applications for 12 spots—seven in D.C. and five in field offices.

As it turned out, the competition was even more intense for Tordo, since she not only wanted to work in D.C., but wanted to stay in “Legs and Regs”—rather than work in a field office. In early 2012, she got the good news: She had a spot with the Honors Program, but she still had a semester of law school to complete.

Washburn again offered assistance, helping Tordo obtain an externship in HUD’s St. Louis field office while she finished her JD. Her time in the field office gave her another perspective on HUD’s work, she says.
Finally, over the summer she learned that she would indeed be working in the coveted “Legs and Regs” office in fall 2012. “I am looking forward to my new career with HUD,” Tordo says. “I am so grateful to Tenille and to Professors Kaplan and Mersmann for their guidance throughout the process.”

‘I help whenever I can’

Washburn cautions against making too much of her role in Tordo’s securing a position at HUD—“I can’t always intervene, but I keep in close contact with Susan Kaplan and help whenever I can,” she says. Tordo’s participation in the D.C. externship played a role, too, augmenting her credentials, she stresses.

Tordo is part of a growing number of Washington University graduates seeking positions with the federal government. “The D.C. clinic has really helped to introduce more students to government service,” Washburn says. “Another contributing factor is the growing desire for ‘work-life balance.’”

Washburn, who has two small children, says that working for the federal government provides the perfect split of home life and work because government employees don’t bill by the hour. Her advice to students? “Step back and think of your long-term goals.”

‘Interns are a win–win’

Tammy Daub, JD ’02, another Congressional & Administrative Law Program veteran, has also helped place Washington University students in externship positions. Daub is currently an attorney with the Civil Rights and Labor Management Division of the Office of the Solicitor.

A self-described “Washington University fan,” she helps enforce federal employment and labor statutes, including non-discrimination and affirmative action requirements that apply to employers. Unlike Washburn, Daub’s career began with working for a firm shortly after graduation. “I spent my first summer in law school doing public service work in New York and my second summer working for a large law firm in D.C.,” she says. “I wanted litigation experience, so I went to work for Ross Dixon Bell LLP (now Troutman Sanders), where I focused on general litigation, insurance, and employment law.

“I made the move to the Department of Labor, in part, because I wanted to devote my practice to labor and employment law,” she adds. Daub, who had externed with the Civil Rights Division’s Employment Litigation Section in the Department of Justice, says the D.C. clinic experience influenced her decision to join the Department of Labor (DOL).

Since she began working for the Solicitor’s Office in 2006, Daub has served on her division’s intern committee. She says that clinic participants who are both full-time and third-year law students are a big draw. Daub also helps recruit students for the DOL’s Honors Program.

“The Washington University students we’ve had for externships have been terrific,” she says. “We are limited by the federal budget, and the externs provide the extra assistance we need. In return, the students gain great experience.”

For example, Kiesha Cockett, JD ’10, as a Washington University clinic participant, externed in Daub’s office. Cockett was ultimately hired into a permanent position as an attorney in the Solicitor’s Office.

“It’s great to hear from students that their externship experience helped them find a job,” Daub says.

‘Securing the positions they earned’

Clinic Co-Director Kaplan is grateful for her former students’ willingness to help place graduates. “Both Tammy and Tenille have been extremely responsive to my calls and emails over the years,” Kaplan says.

Another former extern, Travis England, JD ’09, is now a trial attorney in the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice (DOJ).

“While Travis is not in a position to make hiring decisions, he has kept in touch and recently sent me an announcement of openings for contract work at DOJ,” Kaplan recalls.

Of course, Kaplan says that at the end of the day the students have to stand on their own. “Obviously, the students have excellent credentials—no phone call or personal meeting can do anything if they don’t—but sometimes when you’re dealing with a big bureaucracy like the federal government, great candidates can get lost in the shuffle.”

Co-Director Mersmann concurs: “We are really grateful to our D.C. clinic alumni who are partnering with us to help these students secure the positions they earned.”

—Timothy J. Fox
Alumni, Faculty Help Students Create Nonprofit Firm for St. Louis Immigrants

NICOLE CORTÉS, JD/MSW ’12, AND JESSICA MAYO, JD ’12, the winners of the 2012 Public Service Student of the Year Award, followed one mission throughout much of law school: serving St. Louis’s immigrant communities.

While most students support personal interests by working pro bono service hours, Cortés and Mayo took their passion to the next level by creating their own nonprofit organization, the Migrant and Immigrant Community Action (MICA) Project.

At its core, MICA will provide basic legal services for St. Louis-area clients, answering immigration questions about securing U.S. citizenship, obtaining resident cards, keeping families together, and formulating removal defense. The project will also work with community partners to help immigrants address their nonlegal needs in areas such as health, education, and social services.

Cortés and Mayo’s journey started midway through law school with a visit to Karen Tokarz, the Charles Nagel Professor of Public Interest Law & Public Service and director of the Negotiation & Dispute Resolution Program. The two students, who were enrolled in Tokarz’s Civil Rights & Community Justice Clinic, informed Tokarz that following law school they hoped to form a solo, nonprofit practice to serve St. Louis’s immigrant community. With Tokarz’s input, Cortés and Mayo mapped out a strategy that included classes in the law, business, and social work schools, as well as various clinics and summer internships.

According to Tokarz, law faculty are committed to the law school’s efforts to “provide our students with as many resources as we can, including relevant courses, clinics, summer internships, alumni mentors, and postgraduate collaborations.”

One of the classes Mayo and Cortés selected, Nonprofit Organizations Planning & Drafting, is taught by Peter Ruger, senior lecturer in law and co-director of the law school’s Intellectual Property & Nonprofit Organizations Clinic. The class helped the two navigate the maze of paperwork needed to incorporate MICA as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

“NICOLE AND JESSICA are very unique and exceptional individuals,” says Ruger. “It’s rare to have students who have such a clear vision of what they want to do and the know-how to act upon it midway through law school.”

Another source of inspiration and mentoring support was Stephen Legomsky, the John S. Lehmann University Professor who is currently on leave to serve as chief counsel for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. “Nicole and I both learned a lot that will be useful to us in MICA from Professor Legomsky’s Immigration Law class. We also picked his brain as we interacted with him outside of class through the Immigration Law Society and other activities,” Mayo recalls. Legomsky says he was happy to assist: “Jessica and Nicole are both special people doing special things. Working with them on MICA and other immigration projects has been a real treat.”

At Olin, Mayo participated in a course called The Hatchery, which led to the development of MICA’s business plan. The plan was so well done that in April they were one of seven
winners of the annual YouthBridge Social Enterprise and Innovation Competition, sponsored by the Skandalaris Center for Entrepreneurial Studies. They won the $5,000 student award and received a $30,000 grant from the Daughters of Charity Foundation of St. Louis.

Connecting with Alumni

Tokarz also referred them to Suzanne Brown, JD ’96, founder and senior partner at the Law Offices of Suzanne Brown PC, which concentrates its practice on immigration services. As a result, Mayo and Cortés were legal interns in Brown’s office through Tokarz’s clinic. The two graduate students handled several significant cases involving asylum, Violence Against Women Act beneficiaries, and victims of crime, as well as engaged in community education and legislative advocacy.

“They worked with vulnerable people, and they were very dedicated to the task,” Brown says. But that wasn’t all that impressed Brown, who also decided to devote the first floor of her law office in Olivette, Missouri, to their fledgling practice working on immigration issues.

“When I met them, they were well on their way with their nonprofit,” Brown says. “I gave them guidance that came from my own experience having directed a nonprofit legal services program, the Immigration Project in downstate Illinois.”

Brown and the other two alumni attorneys in her practice, Wesley Schooler, JD ’08, and Naomi Warren, JD ’08, also former clinic students, expect to undertake a number of collaborative projects with Mayo and Cortés as early as this fall.

“The people who come to my office who can’t afford the market rate for legal services will be referred to them,” Brown says. “Nicole and Jessica will learn a great deal when they start working in the community and understanding what the community wants from them. They will also have Wesley, Naomi, and myself nearby for mentoring.”

Cortés and Mayo also plan to collaborate on a community project with the Civil Rights & Community Justice Clinic to provide legal assistance to immigrant youth and young adults seeking deferred action status under the new Dream Act.

A Passion for Immigration Issues

Before starting MICA, both women already had impressive credentials in immigrant services. Cortés, who is fluent in Spanish, worked with a community-based organization in Chile. She also was president of the Immigration Law Society, worked extensively with the Law and Social Work Society, and spent a summer internship with the Migrant Legal Assistance Project of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago.

Mayo completed internships at Interfaith Legal Services for Immigrants and Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, as well as volunteered with a number of local organizations from the Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Program to Project REACH at the St. Patrick Center.

Mayo notes: “St. Louis is a good location for MICA because of the diversity of the immigrant groups who have settled here, from Bosnians in south St. Louis City to the more established East Asian community in St. Louis County.”

Like Mayo, Cortés is eager to serve often-disenfranchised populations. “We are working to promote the voice of the immigrant community in St. Louis,” she says. 

“We are working to promote the voice of the immigrant community in St. Louis.”

—Nicole Cortés, JD/MSW ’12

Co-Founder, Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project

(above) Ken Harrington, managing director of Washington University’s Skandalaris Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, left, congratulates Nicole Cortés, JD/MSW ’12, center, and Jessica Mayo, JD ’12, on their winning entry in the YouthBridge Social Enterprise and Innovation Competition. The prize money is helping fund their new nonprofit organization.
AS CHRIS PIATT, JD ’10, HAS DISCOVERED, it pays to think outside the box, especially outside the traditional, post-law-school, job-market box. And it pays to find just the right mentor.

Although he originally envisioned a different career path, Piatt now utilizes his law training as a campus director in Oklahoma for Vatterott Educational Centers Inc. “I’ve always thought law would be interesting no matter where you ended up, but I was particularly drawn to business defense, including employment law and product liability,” Piatt says. “However, my current job pushed me into a different career path, while still allowing me to use my legal training. It has made me realize that I could step into any job and be successful.”

As a law student, Piatt had completed a summer internship with a Tulsa law firm. Unfortunately, the firm couldn’t afford to hire any of its interns. “The market was tough, especially at the time I was looking for a job,” he recalls.

Now a captain in the Army, Piatt was deployed to Iraq after three semesters of law school, which meant his graduation date was pushed back to December. He soon found himself competing with associates who were also looking for work. “It seemed like I was the only one interviewing for entry-level jobs without three years’ experience,” he says. “Recent graduates had flooded the market.”

Enter Scott Casanover, JD ’00, chief administrator and general counsel at Vatterott, who had approached the Career Services Office about an opening for a student affairs liaison at Vatterott. The position required handling everything from “I don’t like my teacher” to negotiating a settlement when a student breaks x-ray equipment during an externship, Casanover recalls.

“Hiring recent law graduates is a luxury that the current job market allows,” Casanover says. “A decade ago, I couldn’t have afforded to hire a young lawyer for this type of position.”

Despite a fairly narrow job posting and the call to the CSO office, Casanover still received 200 résumés from around
For Students, Alumni Are Formative Mentors

to run a college?” Piatt says. “I’m gaining experience in business, management, operations, and education.”

As demand for CLE continues to grow, the ability to deliver immediate, high-quality programs is paramount, Poscover says. Today, most ALI–ABA CLE programs—whether first presented on-site or as distance learning—are available 24/7 online. That is not to say that the in-person, in-depth CLE program is a dinosaur. It has its place and remains a valuable vehicle for providing educational opportunities for lawyers, Poscover says.

Poscover couples his passion for ongoing professional training with service to the law school and the legal community. A longtime law school National Council member, he co-chairs the school’s Scholarship Initiative along with National Council member Howard Cayne, JD ’79. Poscover also has served as chair of the ABA’s Business Law Section, chair of the section’s Commercial Financial Services Committee, and co-chair of the section’s Pro Bono Project. He is a past member of the ABA Board of Governors and currently serves on the ABA House of Delegates. He also is a past president of the St. Louis Bar Association.

In what he calls one of his most challenging and rewarding roles, from 2007 to 2010, Poscover evaluated nominees as a member of the ABA Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary—two of those nominees included Supreme Court Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

Poscover, who served as chair of Husch Blackwell for 10 years, is a frequent mentor for aspiring young attorneys. “If you are a very good lawyer, you can be satisfied,” he tells firm interns, “but a great deal of personal development and satisfaction comes from giving back to the community and the profession.”

Jerry Naunheim, Jr.

the country—including from attorneys in partner positions—but Piatt’s application stood out.

“Chris had served in the military in Iraq, so he was a little more experienced than a typical recent grad. And he ran a platoon as a lieutenant, so with his leadership experience, he was a perfect fit for the job,” Casanover recalls.

Piatt seized the opportunity and was able to not only start work as a student affairs liaison for 10 of Vatterott’s schools, but also to serve as an associate general counsel. On the legal side, he handled issues encompassing employment law, contracts, education rights, privacy, and transactional regulation.

After a short tenure in student affairs, Piatt was offered an impressive step up the ladder—as director of one of Vatterott’s newest campuses. The Oklahoma school is among Vatterott’s 25 schools located in 10 states, offering instruction in medical assistance, HVAC, diesel mechanics, applied medical mechanics, criminal justice, and computer systems technology, among others.

“It was a difficult choice, but I couldn’t refuse. How many attorneys have the opportunity to run a college?” Piatt says. “I’m gaining experience in business, management, operations, and education.”

Above all, Piatt says he is grateful for Casanover’s help. “Scott is a great mentor,” Piatt says. “He is always trying to help me develop as an attorney and a professional.”

Casanover believes attorneys make great mid-level and leadership-level employees, citing their critical reasoning and analysis abilities, communication skills, and tendency to serve clients with compassion.

Casanover’s own career has taken several interesting turns. Following law school, he was a trial lawyer for eight years and then served as general counsel for a small St. Louis corporation. His current role at Vatterott affords a rewarding combination of work challenges. As chief administrator, he manages Vatterott’s marketing department, a call center, and the human resources department. As general counsel, he deals with intellectual property, real estate transactions, contracts, employee litigation, regulatory considerations, and other legal concerns.

“The education sector is interesting from a legal perspective because for-profit institutions are heavily regulated and because of the variety of legal issues that can come up on any given day,” he says.

Casanover encourages current students and recent alumni to consider opportunities beyond traditional law practice. “There’s a lot of variety in rewarding positions within nonlegal markets. Employers are hungry for smart, hard-working people like law school graduates.”

—By Janet Edwards