Cutting-Edge Institute and Centers Furthering Dialog, Innovations in Research

TOP LAW SCHOOLS at research universities nationally work to create synergies among the delivery of high-end legal education and support for cutting-edge initiatives to further the rule of law. Washington University School of Law’s three centers and institute not only address important legal topics, but they also provide students with transformative research and leadership experiences.

For example, the Crimes Against Humanity Initiative, led by Professor Leila Nadya Sadat, director of the WHITNEY R. HARRIS WORLD LAW INSTITUTE and the Henry H. Oberschelp Professor of Law, produced the Proposed International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity. The project received support from alumnus Steven Cash Nickerson, JD ’85, MBA ’93; Humanity United; and the United States Institute for Peace, among others. As Cash Nickerson Fellows, law students performed related research on the commission of atrocities over the past century and worked on both the proposed convention and a comprehensive book, which was published in 2011 by Cambridge University Press.

Since its founding in 2000, the Harris Institute has sponsored numerous speakers, conferences, and debates on important issues in international law and policy, as well as an ambassadors program and expanded student opportunities for work and study abroad—ranging from the Summer Institute for International Law & Policy to Dagen-Legomsky Hague Fellowships to externships with the international criminal tribunals.

“Our students benefit from not only our international programming and externships around the world, but also from exposure to and working alongside some of the leading minds in international law,” Sadat says.

THE CENTER FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN THE LAW (CERL) is at the forefront of a number of major research projects. Each has harnessed, in some way, the expertise of CERL faculty, staff, and students. Some of the projects, such as the Supreme Court Database, provide a rich data resource—to be used by scholars, teachers, students, and the public—to better understand the legal system. Others, like the As the Code Changes project, highlight important interdisciplinary scholarship conducted by CERL core faculty. Each of these major projects possesses a web presence and draws from sophisticated technology. The center has received funding from the National Science Foundation to support a variety of projects, including one regarding litigation in the federal district courts and another that collects data on each constitutional court in the world.

An important mission of CERL is to help support the community of scholars and practitioners who are engaged with empirical legal research, especially at a time when quantitative social scientific information is playing an increasingly important role in litigation and policy efforts. “We approach our mission by offering related workshops for law and social science faculty and courses for law students and doctoral students in the social sciences,” notes Andrew Martin, vice dean, professor of law and political science, and CERL director. “Our training provides the skills necessary for lawyers, policymakers, and others to understand, present, and rebut arguments based on empirical legal research.”

THE CENTER ON LAW, INNOVATION & ECONOMIC GROWTH (CIEG) is an outgrowth of an earlier center with a new focus driven by current pressing issues at the intersections of law, innovation, and economic growth. In addition to its interdisciplinary conferences, seminars, and workshops, CIEG annually sponsors a program for doctoral students from national and international law schools to present original research papers.

“CIEG supports programs designed to stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue and scholarship within the center’s areas of focus,” says Gerrit De Geest, professor of law and CIEG director. “We aim to create synergies while linking scholars by method, rather than specific topic within theoretical law, economics, and entrepreneurialism.”

Founded in 2000, the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies (CIS) was originally launched to more formally capitalize upon long-standing collaborations among faculty from various departments and schools across the university, while bringing in experts from throughout the world to stimulate scholarly exchange. In more recent years, CIS shifted its focus and its name to the CENTER FOR THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF WORK & SOCIAL CAPITAL, with particular attention to the role that social class, race, and gender play in structuring relationships in society.

While CIS facilitates path-breaking research resulting from the dialog among legal scholars and sociologists, economists, social workers, psychologists, historians, and scientists, CIS events are also designed to foster sustained engagement of students and faculty with top policymakers, particularly emphasizing employment policy and labor markets. In 2011, for example, CIS brought...
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 support 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.

Alumni Provide Vital Assistance to Students

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.

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(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.