ARA GANDAL-POWERS, JD ’11, has been granted a prestigious Health Law Fellowship at the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC). The highly competitive two-year fellowship focuses on projects related to the NWLC’s Health and Reproductive Rights Program.

As a fellow, much of Gandal-Powers’ work will involve compiling research and analyzing policy proposals on subjects such as abortion rights; prevention of unintended pregnancy through improved access to contraception, especially for low-income women; and barriers to reproductive health care access, such as religious restrictions.

“I plan to dedicate my career to improving women’s health,” Gandal-Powers says. “This fellowship will give me an opportunity to gain the skills and experience I need to build a solid foundation for my career.”

Gandal-Powers earned a degree in Women’s Studies from Bowdoin College and worked for a public health association for four years before enrolling at Washington University. She says she decided to attend law school to better prepare herself for a career in women’s health issues. She chose Washington University in part because her father, Larry Gandal, BSBA ’61, JD ’69, is an alumnus.

Gandal-Powers believes her time at the law school has prepared her well, specifically through her Individual Rights & the Constitution and Family Law courses. “Both Professors Neil Richards and Laura Rosenbury provided me with a superb introduction to the substantive law I will need to become an effective advocate for women’s rights.”

Founded in 1972, the NWLC is a nonprofit advocacy organization that works on issues related to the progress of women and girls. Its emphasis is on employment, education, reproductive rights and health, and family issues, and it places a high priority on assisting low-income women and their families. The NWLC also has long been at the forefront of major legal and public policy initiatives, working to educate policymakers and the public, build coalitions, and litigate significant cases.

Last summer, Gandal-Powers had the opportunity to intern at the NWLC, where she learned that a career working on women’s health, especially reproductive rights, would not only “allow me to improve women’s lives, but also excite and challenge me,” she says.

In spring 2011, Gandal-Powers enrolled in the law school’s Congressional & Administrative Law Program in Washington, D.C., working as a law clerk for Senator Al Franken, chairman of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law.

Gandal-Powers reports that she is enjoying her clinical externship in the nation’s capital on the road to her position at the NWLC upon graduation. “Working on reproductive rights now, as the health care reform act is being implemented, is extremely important,” she says. “The law center is one of the strongest advocates for women, and I’m thrilled I’ll be part of their team during this critical time.”