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Dean's Column: UNLV Law Students Making Tracks in Carson City

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Dean's Column



BY GUEST COLUMNIST PROF. ANNE R. TRAUM

UNLV LAW STUDENTS MAKING TRACKS IN CARSON CITY

As any lawyer knows, law school is mostly about absorbing, applying and critiquing the law, and gaining the analytical and practical skills for law practice. Few courses engage students directly in lawmaking, the Legislature's task, even though that is at the heart of what lawyers and judges do. Indeed, lawmaking is often dismissed as a messy project, not a noble pursuit: "Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made."¹

Not true at UNLV, where our law students learn the craft of lawmaking from the best in the business. When the 2015 Legislative Session kicked off in February, 14 UNLV law students in the Legislative Externship Program were on the ground in Carson City, learning the legislative process firsthand.

This immersive experience enables students to absorb the legislative process with all its characters, twists and turns. Although the role of each placement in the legislative process differs, students can expect to research public policy issues and legislative history, track bills, participate in strategy sessions, draft proposed legislation, attend committee meetings and floor hearings, and interact with members of the Nevada Legislature.

The Legislative Externship is one of the many experiential learning opportunities in northern Nevada, where students can spend an entire semester earning credit through participating in externship placements and taking courses.

Diverse Placements Offer Unique Perspectives

For the 2015 Legislative Session, the program was expanded to include more students in more placements than ever before. In past sessions, students have externed at the Legislative Counsel Bureau, the Nevada Hispanic Legislative Caucus, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and several private lobbying firms.

This session, for the first time, UNLV placed four students in Governor Brian Sandoval's office. Casey Stiteler, a 3L student from Reno, is thrilled to be working

with the governor's staff. "I immediately had the opportunity to put the skills I learned in class into practice, while under the guidance of very skilled and supportive professionals," Casey reported, after his first week on the job. "It is safe to say this will be one of the



most important experiences in my law school career.”

A student-driven selection process ensures that each student has an experience that fits well with their interests and career goals. Bailey Bortolin, a Public Interest Fellow who was named the Pro Bono Student of the Year in 2014 by Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, wanted to advocate on related issues in Carson City, following in the footsteps of former Assembly Speaker Barbara Buckley. Brian Vasek, who completed the Juvenile Justice Clinic in the fall, was interested in lobbying for criminal justice reform. Working with John Sasser at Washoe Legal Services and Clark County Public Defender Phil Kohn, the law school established new legislative placements through these longstanding community partners.

Integrating Experience into the Classroom

Though the students are immersed in their placements, they get together for two related courses. Dean Daniel Hamilton and Interim Externship Director Tera Hodge co-teach an externship seminar focusing on professional development and reflection.

Veteran lobbyists Sam McMullen of Porter Gordon Silver and Erin McMullen of R&R Partners teach Legislative Policy in Carson City. The father-daughter team has supervised UNLV externs for the past four sessions. This year they created an innovative course that simulates a private government affairs law firm, in which students serve mock-clients. Students learn about the Nevada legislative process in real-time,

and hone their skills through a series of exercises requiring them to develop a legislative strategy, draft and present bills, plan for hearings, meetings and deadlines, and explore the ethical rules for lawyers, legislators and lobbyists. The course adds a layer of structure and instruction to the work students do at their placements.

Lasting Inspiration

Wiser and more confident, some students catch the political bug. For Lucy Flores (JD '10), the legislative externship was a stepping-stone on her pathway to a political career. “This experience introduced me to the legislative process,” Flores explained, “and inspired me to run for the Assembly, representing District 28: the very same community where I grew up.”

Omar Saucedo (JD '13) and Silvia Villanueva (JD '14) were legislative externs during the 2013 biennial session and, fresh out of law school, each chose to pursue a career in government affairs. Saucedo is External Affairs Coordinator at Nevada System of Higher Education and Villanueva recently joined Griffin Rowe, LLP, a lobbying firm.

“The Carson City externship truly was a unique experience,” said Saucedo. It was also one that proved decisive in his choice of career. Knowing the process and understanding the politics are key skills. But, most importantly, he said, “The relationships you develop during the 120 days you are in session are invaluable.” Such skills can only be learned through living and experiencing life outside of the classroom.

2015 Legislative Externship Placements:

Clark County Public Defenders

Brian Vasek

Fennemore Craig Jones Vargas*

Jose Martin

Governor Sandoval

Jennifer Odell
Alexander Quagge
Casey Stiteler
Ashleigh Wise

Legislative Counsel Bureau*

Edward Wynder

Nevada Hispanic Legislative Caucus*

Gil Lopez

Porter Gordon Silver*

Connor Cain
Thomas Stewart
Chase Whittemore

Snell & Wilmer*

Jennifer Lanahan
Adam Wynnott

Washoe Legal Services

Bailey Bortolin

**2015 Legislative Externship
Scholarship Sponsor NL*

1. Though this, or a variant, is often misattributed to Otto Von Bismarck, it can reportedly be traced to lawyer-poet John Godfrey Saxe in The Daily Cleveland Herald, Mar. 29, 1869. See Fred R. Shapiro, “Quote ... Misquote,” *On Language*, *NY Times*, July 1, 2008.



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