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Dean Logan's Blog

An Insider's Tour of "Legal Washington"

Posted by David Logan on 06/03/2010 at 12:09 PM

On March 18 and 19, seventeen second year Honors Program students were given an insider's view of litigation in The Highest Court in the Land—the Supreme Court of the United States. The trip to Washington, D.C. was the culmination of a six week “perspectives course” on the Supreme Court taught by Prof. Diana Hassel, who was joined on the whirlwind trip by DC insider Prof. Jared Goldstein.



RWUers with Associate Justice Alito

The visit began with reserved seats in the Supreme Court to watch the arguments in two cases raising significant constitutional issues. The first, *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, dealt with the clash between a religious student organization's desire to control its membership and the mandate of a state university that official student organizations not discriminate. The second case, *City of Ontario v. Quon*, focused on the privacy interests of a police officer who used his government issued pager for private purposes. After these arguments, the students were given a tour of the Supreme Court building and then had the opportunity to meet with Justice Samuel Alito and one of his clerks. Justice Alito took questions from the students and spoke about the workload of the Court and the effect oral argument could have on the outcome of a case.

Later that day, the group was able to meet with Deputy Solicitor General Neal Katyal who had argued earlier that day as amicus in the Quon case. Access to the Solicitor General's office was arranged by Professor Goldstein, a former Justice Department attorney who served as a Bristow Fellow at the Solicitor General's office before coming to RWU. Deputy Solicitor General Katyal discussed the work of the office with the students and described the kind of preparation that preceded a Supreme Court argument.

The next morning, the students met with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a great friend of the School of Law. In a lively (and candid) session, he shared an insider's perspective on key issues

currently before the Senate Judiciary Committee, including the effort of President Obama to fill a second seat on the Supreme Court. A tour of the Capitol conducted by members of the Senator's staff followed. Of particular interest was a visit to the old Supreme Court Courtroom located in the Capitol where many important cases were heard in the 19th century.