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June 2, 2017

Dean Yelnosky's Post

Experiences, Connections and Opportunities: A Real World Perspective from Recent RWU Law Grads

Posted by Michael Yelnosky on 06/02/2017 at 10:09 AM



As spring is finally springing and commencement is behind us, we (Tiffany Healey and Nicole Dyszlewski) wanted to take a stroll down memory lane and check in with some of the members of last year's graduating class - the Class of 2016. Specifically, we wanted to pick their brains to find out what types of opportunities made a difference when they transitioned into the next stages of their careers. We wanted to know how the opportunities they were presented at RWU Law impacted them. Lucky for us, our alumni are wise and willing to talk!

One of the great dilemmas here at RWU Law is picking the events to attend and opportunities to pursue. There are limitless possibilities, but free time is finite. Students are busy studying, externing, reading, outlining, case briefing, volunteering, interning, and job hunting. In addition, they may be working. Before, after, during, and in between, our students have opportunities to grow, network, engage, and connect in countless ways. As an example, in the last few weeks there has been an event with acclaimed author Bryan Stevenson, a panel on law firm hiring practices, a discussion of criminal justice reform in Rhode Island, the annual Diversity Dinner

Symposium, a Phi Alpha Delta food drive, a Law Review banquet, a scholarship presentation, and two Academic Success workshops.

One recent alum we contacted was Adam Kane. He is currently an Assistant District Attorney in Bronx County and his comments were insightful and reflective. "All of the events I attended while in law school helped me more than I had realized at the time. Meeting different practicing attorneys and having opportunities to network allowed me to get tips about the bar exam, internship opportunities, and valuable recommendations." Like Adam, all of the recent graduates we spoke with agreed on one thing; experiences inside *and* outside the classroom are important. When asked what opportunities, events or people, beyond classwork, helped most now that they are beyond our walls, the graduates all had similar responses - networking, connecting with professors, and engaging in extracurricular activities such as Law Review and Moot Court.

Gaining practical experience through Alternative Spring Break, externships, clinics, internships, work study, and pro bono work were the law school experiences that had the greatest impact on the graduates' professional lives and transition from law school to starting their careers. Arwa Noorali is currently pursuing her Master's in Cyber Security Policy and Governance at Boston College. When asked what experiences have stayed with her, she stated, "Although lessons taught inside the classroom were great, it was the opportunities outside of the building that most affected my life. For me, the pro bono projects done with the Feinstein Center and the Clinics I did in my final year made the greatest impact as I finally got the chance to help people." D. Thomas Peterson ("Tom"), a Staff Attorney, Criminal Defense Practice, at The Bronx Defenders had a similar response. "The two [experiences] that had the most impact on me were both experiential learning - the semester in the criminal defense clinic and the semester that I had in the New York Pro Bono Scholars program. The clinic was my first real experience in representing clients, and I learned a lot about how to do that. My time as a Pro Bono Scholar at the Bronx Defenders was critical in allowing me to transition to the position I am in with little to no problems." Erik Edson, an associate at Kelly & Mancini, in Providence explained, "The work we do here is mostly commercial litigation, real estate and land use, and municipal law. While I'm not yet certain of what ultimate 'career path' I'll find myself on, each of my experiential opportunities helped substantially to prepare me for the work I do." Casey M. Charkowick, Staff Attorney in the Corporate Legal Department of Textron, Inc. also credits experiential learning with shaping his career. "My time with Justice Goldberg in the Judicial Externship Program was an incredibly valuable learning experience for me. I put my legal skills to the test for the first time. Justice Goldberg was an incredible mentor who pushed me and held me to the highest standards. My legal writing and research skills improved tremendously during the time I was with Justice Goldberg."

For Alisha Hennen, our new Access Services/Assessment Librarian (who is also attending the University of Rhode Island in a Master's Program at the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies) it was her work study experience that made a difference. "After completing my first year of law school, I began working in the law library as a student library assistant. Working in the library for two years led me down a path that I had not

originally intended when entering law school--it led me to want to become a law librarian. With the support and mentorship of the librarians at the law school, I applied for my MLIS at URI and began the program in September 2016. My connection to the school and desire to enter the profession also led me to apply for an open librarian position at RWU Law this past fall.” Kelley Nobriga, a law clerk with the Maryland Circuit Court, said her decision to pursue a clerkship was greatly influenced by her participation in the Judicial Externship Program. “As an extern, I learned the importance of researching quickly and writing effectively. Those skills were directly transferable to my responsibilities as a law clerk, and my exposure to the judicial externship program provided me an advantage when transitioning to my first job out of law school.”

While our alumni each gained different experiences, mastered different challenges, and traveled different paths, the common themes of getting involved, gaining hands-on experience, and developing solid legal skills emerged. We also asked these graduates to share some advice for current students or those who will be joining RWU Law in the fall – the members of the Class of 2020.

Erik Edson emphasizes being open-minded, as his job search experience brought him to an area of law he had not at first considered. “Just because you felt more interested in a certain job or area of law during school doesn't mean you won't be happy in a setting you hadn't considered much. Law school has given you the tools and framework for learning what you don't already know - your ability to adapt will surprise you.” Adam Kane's advice is similar. “When I first started looking for a job I came across an article that listed some pointers on how to fix your resume and how to prepare for an interview, but the one thing that stood out to me in that article was the last sentence. It read, ‘you can't control where you start you[r] legal career but you do have control over where you end up.’ The job I ultimately accepted was at a small personal injury firm as a law clerk, and after being admitted to the bar I was made an associate. I tried to learn everything I could but constantly looked for [a] job opening in a field I was interested in. After two months there I left after being offered my dream job. My advice is to make applying for jobs your full-time job until you get one. Take all of the interviews you can get and don't hold out for the perfect job.”

Alisha Hennen agrees. “I think it is important to give yourself leeway and not put too much pressure on yourself when looking for your first job after law school...Be open to exploring new opportunities because you might end up down a path that will make you happier and more fulfilled than the one you originally intended.”

Finally, two alumni stressed the importance of hard work and of believing in yourself. Kelley Nobriga says, “You need to believe in yourself, your training and the skills you've gained. When you do that, you'll be able to advocate for yourself as you begin your career. Casey Charkowick is even more direct. “DO NOT TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER.” If there is no position posted, create your own and convince them to give it to you...Work harder than anyone in the room... Pay close attention to details. Find common ground WITH EVERYONE. Don't be opinionated until you've earned it. Again, WORK HARDER THAN ANYONE IN THE ROOM. Don't stop

learning. Read everything. Challenge yourself. Recognize that graduating law school and passing the bar does not mean that you know all you need to know to succeed. It just means that you are prepared to work really hard to learn what you need to know to succeed.”