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Law School Report

Law school students come from

A doctor; a concert violinist, a rabbi and a naval officer...
The new class of students at the University at Buffalo Law School may be more diverse in background and experience than any in recent memory. *A software engineer; a political science professor; a Korean interpreter for British royalty...*

Of the 247 first-year students enrolled this fall at the UB Law School, about half possess the prototypical law-school student portfolio – just a year or two removed from undergraduate study, a liberal arts degree, a high score on the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) – but many come to the school from wide-ranging paths that have taken them all over the world.

And, according to UB Law School Dean Nils Olsen, the diversity is by design.

“We really do emphasize diversity,” Olsen says. “Because of the extraordinary pressure to achieve high national rankings, many law schools focus their recruiting around criteria used to rank law schools – LSAT scores, past academic performance. But we have made a practice over the years of looking at the entire student – not just the numbers — and try to admit a very diverse group of students.”

A Soviet Union-born entrepreneur; a Mormon missionary and a comedy-troupe performer...

Law, Olsen explains, is one of the few professions that touch all walks of life. Classroom diversity, and the exchange of diverse viewpoints and ideas that it fosters, creates better lawyers with broader perspective, he says.

Which is partly why in the first-year torts course, you'll find former political science professor Elizabeth Pascal, Ph.D., from Connecticut, sitting alongside Priscilla Hampton, a 1998 Stanford University graduate and seven-year U.S. Navy veteran who served on a destroyer for two tours of duty, one of them in the Persian Gulf supporting troops in Afghanistan.

“I was surprised by the diversity, by how many people have done a variety of different things,” says Pascal, a mother of two, who hopes to pursue a career in public-interest law.

“It adds to class discussion when someone can cite personal experiences – when someone who has bought and sold a house can talk about property law, or in our torts class when we were discussing selling things like blood, and someone in the class said they had used a sperm donor.”

“There's a big mix of students,” adds Hampton, who became interested in law while stationed in Hawaii with her husband, also a naval officer, where they saw first-hand some of the land-use issues facing native Hawaiians. “You have your typical students ages 25 and 26 and then you have ex-military people and other non-traditional students...you get a lot of different perspectives and experiences.”

Dr. Lilly Barros, age 35, is “on sabbatical” from her medical practice in Rochester. She's considering using her law degree to defend physicians in medical malpractice cases. The eclectic Patrick Craig, 27, earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English literature from the University of the South and Brooklyn College, respectively. While in New York, he performed with the comedy troupe Stilted on Stage at the famous comedy nightclub Carolines on Broadway. “I see a law degree as a jumping-off point for many different possibilities,” he says.

As a professional interpreter, the well-traveled Yu Mi Choi was hired by the



British Embassy to assist Prime Minister Tony Blair and Queen Elizabeth II during diplomatic tours of Korea. It was while working as an interpreter in Missouri during a murder case involving a Korean witness, however, that Choi developed an interest in law. “The district attorneys were great; the experience gave me an inside look at the legal system,” says Choi, who after graduation may practice family law and return to Korea with her husband and 3-year-old daughter.

all walks of life



Naval Officer Priscilla "Polly" Hampton, pictured with her commanding officer Captain Dave Buss onboard the USS Sacramento, likes the mix of students at UB Law School.

Melissa Fruscione, UB Law School's director of recruiting, says the school seeks to enroll diversity "in every sense of the word": ethnic, racial, religious, experiential and geographic. Half of the Law School's new class came straight from undergraduate institutions, Fruscione says, but 34 percent of the class is



Patrick Craig founded and performed with a comedy troupe before enrolling in the UB Law School.



Juilliard graduate Larissa S. Shahmatova toured Russia as a solo violinist.

25 years old or older, and 21 of the new students possess advanced degrees. The students hail from 23 U.S. states.

"Some law schools base their recruitment on numbers, and they have seen an eight to 10 point jump in average LSAT scores; however, they have compromised the overall quality of their class," Fruscione says. "That's something we hope to avoid. Numbers aren't always the best indicators of quality."

A salesman, an environmentalist and interns for talk-show host Ellen De-

Generes and newsmen Tim Russert...

Rabbi Drorah Setel is from a family of lawyers, so perhaps it's not a surprise that she chose to relocate from Seattle to pursue a law degree at the age of 49. Setel is considering a career in public-interest law to continue in Buffalo some of the domestic-violence advocacy work she started while at her former synagogue. "There are similarities between being a lawyer and a rabbi," she says. "Each requires a similar analytical thought process."

Twenty-nine-year-old Larissa Shamatova is a classically trained violinist who as a teen toured throughout Russia and performed concerts with Russia's major orchestras, such as the Moscow Philharmonic. After graduating from Juilliard, she worked as a fundraiser for the Lincoln Center in New York City. She hopes a law degree will enable her to more fairly represent the legal interests of musicians and artists. Another Russian, classmate Oleg Rybak, moved to the U.S. in 1993, two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Armed with a law degree and a master's degree in European Studies, he hopes one day to return to Russia to help businesspeople create companies.

For former radio-ad salesman Daniel Kuhn, 27, the road to law school was filled with trials and tribulations. He became interested in law after successfully defending himself in town courts for a few speeding tickets he picked up while traveling to and from sales meetings.

Now settled in Brockport with his wife and 7-month-old son, Kuhn in June completed his degree in criminal justice, has worked for the Monroe County public defender's office and is responsibly making the 60-mile commute to the UB campus each day.

"I am interested in criminal law, but since coming to UB I've realized that there are many different aspects of law that appeal to me," Kuhn says.