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Faces in the Crowd: For the Class of 2009, All Roads Lead to Buffalo

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As classes began this fall at UB Law School, 249 members of the incoming Class of 2009 opened their notebooks to a world of possibilities. They come from near and far: One in five members of the first-year class are from outside New York State, from such locales as Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, California, Wisconsin, Utah, Canada, Texas, Florida, Virginia, Washington State, Maryland, Minnesota, Louisiana, Alabama, Connecticut – and South Korea.

The Law School accepted 57 percent of applicants, said Lilke V. Wiley-Upshaw, vice dean for admissions and financial aid. The new enrollees averaged a score of 150 on the Law School Admissions Test and a 3.4 grade point average in their undergraduate institutions, continuing a trend of improved academic quality for the Law School’s incoming students.

In addition, Wiley-Upshaw said, “13 percent of the first-year students hold graduate degrees, ranging from philosophy to music to engineering.”

But numbers do not tell the whole story. For one student, the first day of Law School is the end of a long path to Law School.

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Wesley has published on the ways that the legal world and the world of education intersect, and with his brother, Second Circuit Judge Richard C. Wesley, has presented at education law conferences. “We found that there was a real audience,” he said, “because educators were frightened to death of the law.”

“Over a period of time, probably 20 years, I was reading very deeply in the law,” Wesley said. “But when you do not have a legal education, there is only so much you can do. So after 28 years in the field, and coming to my 60th birthday, I am grateful to have been accepted. I have had four weeks of wonderful experiences, and I am as excited as a kid. Now I want to really be challenged, and UB is doing that. I have wonderful professors, I have wonderful classmates. I am just having a ball. I read and write about the law all day long.”

His classmate Brian Manning also has followed a circuitous road to UB Law. Born and raised in Buffalo, after graduating from Colgate University he lived for seven years in Denver, working in a print shop and as a buyer for a large bookstore, and taught in the Denver public schools. He then moved to Arizona and worked as a teacher on the Tohono O’Odham Indian reservation, 30 miles from the Mexican border.

“But it was pretty intense,” Manning said. “It was very isolated, in the middle of the desert. It took me 35 minutes to drive to nearest store, even if I wanted a carton of milk. There were a lot of Mexican walking through desert, they would knock on my back door and ask for water.

After six months there, he went to Mexico to study Spanish and ended up in Taxco, “the silver jewelry hub of the Western Hemisphere.” There he met his wife, Claudia, and got into the silver business, eventually opening a store that sold jewelry by local artisans to wholesalers in Dallas and Manhattan.

Their daughter was born in 2003, and Manning said they wanted to come to the United States to ensure a range of opportunities for her. In Buffalo, he worked in the legal assistance department at the refugee assistance agency Vive La Casa. “I have always wanted to go to law school,” Manning said. “I had an idea that I would be wanting to go before I started working at Vive, but then it just clicked. I love it. Certainly it is a lot of work, but for me it is just such a privilege to go back to school at the age of 56.”

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A 9 percent of applicants, said Lillie V. Wiley-Upshaw, vice dean for admissions and financial aid. The new enrollees averaged a score of 15.0 on the Law School Admissions Test and a 3.4 grade point average in their undergraduate institutions, continuing a trend of improved academic quality for the Law School’s incoming students.

In addition, Wiley-Upshaw said, “13 percent of the first-year students hold graduate degrees, ranging from philosophy to music to engineering.” But numbers do not tell the whole story.

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