A Summer Sampling of Law School Leads to the Real Thing

UB Law Forum
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Two participants in the first session of DiscoverLaw, which took place in 2012, are nearing the end of their first year at SUNY Buffalo Law School. The month-long program is a joint venture of the Law School, the Minority Bar Association of Western New York and the Law School Admissions Council. Students live on the UB North Campus for the month, and earn a stipend to offset lost income. It is designed to make law school more accessible to students of color, who historically have been underrepresented in the legal profession.

“We are very pleased with the outcomes that we are realizing from the DiscoverLaw program, including increased diversity among our 1L class,” says Vice Dean for Admissions and Student Life Lillie Wiley-Upshaw. “Two alumni of the 2012 session are now law students and they say that what they learned in DiscoverLaw and the warm reception they received on campus has been invaluable in their decision-making and their adjustment to the rigorous life of a 1L.

“I am so proud of them. Not only is this program making a difference in their lives, but in the profession as well.”

Ninterete Jean Pierre ’16, a native of the African nation of Burundi and a resident of Rochester, was entering his senior year at Buffalo State College and studying criminal justice when he entered DiscoverLaw. At the time he said, “The workload was ridiculous – so much work, it was almost undoable. But somehow we got through it. ... It’s a reality. To make the decision about whether to attend law school, you need to know the amount of work that’s going to be involved, so it won’t come as a surprise.”

Now, proceeding through his first year at SUNY Buffalo Law, Jean Pierre says, “For me it was helpful, especially in the admission process. DiscoverLaw exposed me to what I needed to know to be successful – the workload, the discipline, all of the things you need as a law student.”

The workload of a law student, he says, “cannot compare to undergraduate school. Then, it was maybe two hours a day of studying. Here, I study all day, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.” But, he says, the work ethic he developed during that summer session has stayed with him. “I tried my best when I was part of the DiscoverLaw program and worked my hardest,” he says. At SUNY Buffalo Law, Jean Pierre has found some new interests, moving away from his criminal justice background and gravitating toward human rights work and business transactions law.

His classmate Brittany Andrews ’16, was an English major at Syracuse University when she took part in the DiscoverLaw program. She says the program helped cement her longstanding interest in becoming a lawyer.

“I didn’t even know Buffalo had a law school until I submitted the application,” says Andrews, an Atlanta native. She remembers arriving in the pouring rain “with two huge suitcases” and being welcomed by the SUNY Buffalo Law students who served as resident assistants.

The writing assignments that the professors required, she says, came back with extensive notes and corrections, but she also received affirmation that she was a good writer and a good thinker. “I got an idea of how well I can analyze and articulate myself on paper,” says Andrews, who has a strong interest in environmental law.

She also learned how important it is to take care of oneself – to get enough sleep, to hit the gym for stress relief, to eat something better than fruit snacks for breakfast. Those lessons have stayed with her at the Law School, where, she says, it’s “a different kind of busy from undergrad. It’s class all day, and your brain hurts. You have to study hard and get everything done, but you still have to be a human being.

“The thing I took away most from the program was knowing that this was something I wanted to do,” she says. “It was the exposure I needed. Before you invest in law school, you have to know you want to do it. Having had that exposure made me more confident in my decision.”

The DiscoverLaw program was funded by a three-year grant from the Law School Admissions Council, and this summer’s cohort is the last under that funding. Karen R. Kaczmarski ’89, associate dean for development, says the school is hoping to continue the program with alternative funding. “The Law School has been working closely with key alumni and friends to obtain financial support from individual donors, corporations and foundations to ensure the continuation of the program, and all donations are welcomed and appreciated,” she says.

For information or to make a donation, contact Kaczmarski at (716) 645-6429 or kkrkacz@buffalo.edu, or visit www.law.buffalo.edu/scholarsProgram.html.