Tennessee Law Spring 2019

University of Tennessee College of Law

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UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE COLLEGE OF LAW
SPRING 2019 | ADVOCATE

JUSTICE FOR ALL

CHERI BEASLEY’S JOURNEY TO BECOME THE NORTH CAROLINA SUPREME COURT CHIEF JUSTICE
ad·vo·cate

noun
1 An individual who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group.

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from the DEAN’S DESK

The University of Tennessee College of Law enjoys an incredible legacy.

A significant part of that legacy includes our amazing alumni. With alumni engaged in transformative work all over the world, our reach and influence from our home in East Tennessee remains remarkable and grows with every class of graduates.

You’ll find the UT Law influence highlighted in this issue of Tennessee Law in which we trace the paths of a number of our accomplished alumni. We follow alumna Cheri Beasley’s journey to become the North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice. She says as a law student, she didn’t envision becoming a state supreme court justice. Instead, she aspired to help people.

That same desire to assist the underserved resonates in Ashley Adams’ story, too. Her life experiences influenced her to attend law school where she studied to become an advocate for the falsely accused and imprisoned. And UT Law alumna Michele Johnson, now the executive director of the Tennessee Justice Center, who as a law student co-founded the UT Pro Bono program at the College of Law, talks about her drive to keep families together through work that impacts all Tennesseans. In all of these stories from UT Law graduates, and so many others yet to be told, you’ll find the volunteer spirit and a compassion for those in need.

I hope you enjoy reading about how faculty, staff, students, and alumni are working together to positively impact their communities and the world.

Go Vols!

MELANIE D. WILSON, DEAN
"I was like many of you," she said. "I was a first-generation college student, and my family’s socioeconomic status made it seem as though there was no way I could afford to go to college."

Sawyers Belk talked about the challenges she faced as a single mother throughout undergraduate and law school.

"I don’t encourage anyone to do it the way I did it," she said. "My daughter was two, and there were days when I had to bring her to school with me. And it was hard. It was embarrassing. It was stressful. But my alternative – not going to school and not finding that life for myself – was worse."

Sawyers Belk, an attorney and adjunct professor at the University of Tennessee College of Law and a 2006 alumna, wasn’t addressing a class of college students. On this day, she spoke with a group of nearly 70 underrepresented students from South-Doyle, Austin-East and Fulton high schools in Knoxville.

The students visited the College of Law as part of the Diversity Pipeline Program, designed to introduce those from underrepresented communities to the value of a college education and the variety of career opportunities that exist for those with a legal degree.

Through the program, Admissions Director Sarah Busse said students "learn about careers in law and receive support and encouragement from University of Tennessee College of Law staff and faculty on how to pursue a college degree."

Over the course of the students’ day-long visit, they attended a typical criminal law class with Professor Joy Radice, engaged in a question and answer session with current students, learned about resources that aid student success, and heard from alumni about how to avoid common pitfalls in their careers. The students also shared lunch with law professors.

While this is the first such partnership with local high schools, Busse said she believes it is important to continue to grow it in order to help students from underrepresented communities gain a better understanding of the possibilities that exist for them.

"Of course, we are committed to recruiting a strong pool of diverse applicants. We also want to create that ripple effect that can result in a more diverse presence throughout the legal community," Busse said. "We want to see these students be successful in all walks of life."

Sonja Wood, a college and career coordinator who attended along with nearly 20 students from South-Doyle High School, said it was important to her to provide the opportunity for underrepresented students to learn more about the University of Tennessee.
“Most of them have never entertained a notion of anything beyond getting a job, drawing a check, or, at most, going to a community college,” Wood said. “So I wanted to expose them to this as early as their freshman year. We have ninth graders here today, too, just so they can see what’s possible.”

Wood said the event was the best she’s attended in her more than eight years of assisting college-bound students, and she was surprised by some of her students’ responses.

“I’ve seen one girl smile today who I’ve never seen smile before,” Wood said. “They are engaged, interested, and asking questions. I’ve seen their eyes light up.”

Aaryanna Billingsley, a 16-year-old South-Doyle High School junior, said she’s considering attending college at the University of Tennessee.

Her academic strengths in science have had her considering a career as a doctor, she said. But during her visit to the College of Law, law students and professors made her rethink her aptitude for arguing and practicing law.

“I’m the kind of person I like to plan ahead and be ahead of my class,” she said. It’s been good “hearing people in the profession, practicing law.

During her freshman year. We have ninth graders here today, just so they can see what’s possible.”

Her visit to the College of Law, law students and professors made her rethink her aptitude for arguing and practicing law.

I’m the kind of person I like to plan ahead and be ahead of my class,” she said. It’s been good “hearing about the work ethic these students have and how they support each other.”

Also by learning about student organizations like the Native American Law Student Association and the Black Law Student Association, Billingsley said was better able to envision herself at the College of Law.

“Knowing that there are African-American and Latino student groups here, it makes a difference,” she said.

“Recent recruitment efforts have increased access to justice for all.”

Throughout the month of April, the University of Tennessee College of Law celebrated the 25th anniversary of student pro bono service.

Students are at the heart of UT Pro Bono, sharing the responsibility of organizing a majority of the volunteer events throughout the year for their classmates.

Activities this academic year have included conducting meetings and discussions to help familiarize veterans with resources that can assist them, offering Volunteer Income Tax Assistance to low-income individuals and families, partnering with faculty attorneys to offer advice to Tennessee residents through a legal assistance website, and assisting in the Legal Clinic’s expungement events.

Several students spent their spring break weeks in Texas, Kentucky, and Middle Tennessee in pro bono service. Some of the group assisted at the Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, Texas to prepare immigrants for their asylum process.

Another group traveled to Fort Campbell, Kentucky and worked alongside JAG officers serving the 101st Airborne Division of the U.S. Army. Others volunteered with Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services in Nashville and with Legal Aid of East Tennessee in Knoxville.

Through these efforts, students have completed more than 7,800 hours of pro bono service. Thirty-seven students have each completed more than 75 hours; eight students have completed 50 hours; and 10 students have completed 25 hours.

In honor of the students’ commitment to pro bono, alumni visited the College of Law on April 5 to celebrate and recognize the anniversary of the program. Michelle Johnson, executive director of the Tennessee Justice Center, recalled the beginnings of the UT Pro Bono organization that she and alumnus Jonathan Cole partnered to form.

Having completed summer internships in public interest law positions, the two brainstormed after their experiences to create a process that would enable students to meet with people who needed legal advice, Johnson said.

“I loved the power of standing with someone who had no power, armed with a little civil procedure and evidence knowledge, knowing I could change their life,” she said.

Johnson praised former deans Richard “Dick” Wirtz and Doug Blaze for supporting students and inspiring them to fulfill their dreams. During that first year, the students established relationships with organizations like Legal Aid Society of East Tennessee that have continued for 25 years, Johnson said.

Also during the event, George “Buck” Lewis, an alumnus, Baker Donelson partner, and the Larry Wilks Distinguished Practitioner in Residence at the College of Law, congratulated the 2018 graduating class for working more than 11,700 hours of pro bono service during their three years of study.

“Pro bono is one of the core values of the profession,” Lewis said. “It helps young lawyers, young graduates and law students, handle matters that they might not get to handle for a long time, if ever, in their regular practice setting.”

Jerry Black, associate professor of law emeritus, acknowledged student Tony Cognasi by presenting him with the Pierce-Black Award for pro bono service.

Cognasi has volunteered with Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee, worked alongside volunteer lawyers at Saturday bar events, participated in the UT Legal Clinic and led the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, Black said.

“In trying to decide whether to take a recent case in the Advocacy Clinic, Tony said, ‘If we don’t take this case who will?’” Black said. “It is that reaction that sums up Tony’s drive to increase access to justice for all.”

A South-Doyle High School student listens to instructions as she learns about legal casework.

Aaryanna Billingsley, a 16-year-old South-Doyle High School junior, said she’s considering attending college at the University of Tennessee.
Former University of Tennessee Athletics Director Joan Cronan offered that advice to law students during a spring semester discussion organized by the College of Law’s Institute for Professional Leadership.

“In my opinion, Pat Summitt is one of the best coaches and leaders we’ve ever had in Tennessee and beyond,” Cronan said. “If you think about it, the two most successful people who are associated with Tennessee are both women — Pat Summitt and Dolly Parton. Both had enormous pride in Tennessee and both valued giving back to their communities.”

Cronan’s visit to the College of Law was just one of the activities organized recently by the Institute for Professional Leadership to help students develop leadership skills. The institute organizes events, courses, and practicums to offer future lawyers guidance and encouragement and help them develop values that are essential to successful law practice.

### COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

**A LESSON IN LEADERSHIP**

Strive to turn controversy into a win-win situation, always retain your humility, and don’t forget to enjoy your journey.

Former University of Tennessee Athletics Director Joan Cronan offered that advice to law students during a spring semester discussion organized by the College of Law’s Institute for Professional Leadership.

“Never in our lifetime will we ever know anyone who had more accolades. But more importantly, nobody I know who has had that many accolades has been more humble, and she never lost that,” Cronan said. “When we look at a leader, I think that sort of humility is very important.”

Cronan described for students some of the events of her life that have helped her succeed.

When she was 12 years old, she went to the baseball field in her small Louisiana town to try out for the boy’s baseball team, she said. Cronan was told she could keep score, coach, or lead cheers, but she couldn’t be on the team.

“I knew from that time I wanted to be in the business that helped women learn sport,” she said.

Cronan went on to college to prepare herself for finding a position as an athletic director and obtained degrees in math and physical education supervision. But if she were to plot her course again today, she said she would pursue degrees in business administration and law.

With that set of educational credentials, “I think I could have been an even better athletic director,” she said. “Your law degree ties directly to athletics.”

Cronan encouraged students to embrace competition, because “we get better when someone else is pushing us” to strive to improve their communication skills because “those are the things that are going to help you be successful” and to act with confidence.

“Make sure you’re taking the time to analyze why you win as well as why you lose,” she said.

Cronan said she establishes her daily priorities with the help of the acronym “BELLS,” and encouraged students to find a way to similarly keep themselves grounded and focused. Cronan commits daily to reading her “B”ible, “E”xercising, “L”earning something new, “L”etter writing, and undertaking a “S”pecial project that can be as small as organizing a junk drawer.

“I can tell you that the days I make the bells ring, I feel a lot better about Joan Cronan. In tennis and in life, it’s better to serve than receive,” she said. “Come up with a system to get your priorities right, and keep serving.”

In addition to her discussion with students, the Institute for Professional Leadership has featured Cronan — along with a number of other leaders both in Tennessee and the legal profession — as part of the institute’s Six-Pack Series.

Learn more about the institute at https://law.utk.edu/programs/leadership/.

Cronan told students one of the greatest leadership lessons she learned throughout her 30 years of working with Summitt was the importance of being humble.

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College of Law graduates remain successful finding jobs, both at the time of graduation and 10 months afterward, keeping the school’s post-graduation employment rates among the highest in five years.

According to information shared in April with the American Bar Association, 93% of 2018 graduates were employed 10 months after graduation. Of these, 89% are employed in bar passage required jobs or J.D.-advantage jobs.

At the time of graduation in 2018, 61% of students were employed — the highest percentage in at least five years and a rate that’s 30% higher than employment levels of 2014.

In all, 106 of 114 graduates are now employed and a large percentage of them found positions in Tennessee.

“We are obviously very pleased with this trend and the hard work that these numbers represent,” College of Law Dean Melanie Wilson said. “Our goal is to help prepare our students become the most successful lawyers and leaders that they can be, but our students must also be committed to finding employment that best suits their career goals.”

“Our career services team has done an outstanding job working with students and helping lay the groundwork for their success,” Wilson said. “And our students are the real beneficiaries of all of this hard work.”

The graduates found jobs in a variety of settings, including 52% in private practice, 20% in business and industry, 12% in government, 9% in judicial clerkships, 4% in public interest, and 3% in education.

Interim Director of the College of Law’s Bettye B. Lewis Career Center Joe Christian said the outcome reflects the commitment of faculty, administration, and staff in supporting the Career Center team as it connects students and employers.

“We strive to equip our students from day one with the skills, knowledge, and connections they need to be successful,” Christian said. “It is important to us that each student receives the individual attention he or she needs to successfully pursue not just a good job, but a career that is meaningful to them.”

The University of Tennessee works with students and alumni at every stage of their careers and serves as a resource for employers of all types.

“Students will complete three years of general education and upper-division courses before they take the law school admissions test in their junior year. Provided they are successful and meet law school admission standards, students will begin their legal studies during their senior year of undergraduate school and complete both undergraduate and juris doctor degrees in six years,” Christian said.

“We look forward to expanding our 3+3 program and helping talented students from Martin enhance their educational opportunities. This is yet another way we are staying connected to our friends in West Tennessee,” said College of Law Dean Melanie Wilson. “Our 3+3 partnership with Martin is the first with another UT campus and reflects our great relationship with UT Martin Chancellor Keith Carver.”

Students who participate in the 3+3 program at UT Martin will still earn an undergraduate degree from that institution.

UT Martin Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages Chair David Carthers said he believes this will be an attractive opportunity for students.

“The new legal studies option places them on a more direct path from here to a top law school in the state,” Carthers said.
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

LAW STUDENT SELECTED FOR UT KNOXVILLE ADVISORY BOARD

University of Tennessee College of Law first-year student Johnelle Simpson has been appointed to serve as the student member on the UT Knoxville Advisory Board.

During a meeting of the board in March, Interim Chancellor Wayne Davis recommended Simpson for the position.

Simpson’s term extends from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, and he says he is honored to have been selected.

“I believe my experience working with campus administrators in a trustee capacity will be a value add to the board,” he said. “I am ready to advocate for all UT Knoxville students and move our university closer toward its goals.”

Simpson has extensive experience in student leadership positions. He was president of the University of Georgia’s Student Government Association in 2015-16 during his senior year, and he served as a student member of the University of Georgia’s Board of Trustees. Since arriving at the University of Tennessee, Simpson has been elected as a first-year representative for the Student Bar Association and is a graduate student senate representative.

Davis said Simpson was recommended for the advisory board position by the provost, deans of the College of Graduate Studies and the College of Law, and the graduate student senate.

“He is very qualified,” Davis said. “He is fully engaged as a student, and ... an emerging leader in the College of Law.”

The UT FOCUS Act, passed by the Tennessee General Assembly in April 2018, created an advisory board for each UT campus. The boards are charged with submitting recommendations to the UT System Board of Trustees on campus-level strategic plans, operating budgets and tuition.

The board includes five public members appointed by the governor, one faculty member appointed by the campus’s faculty senate, and one student member appointed by the advisory board.

Current public board members include Alexia Poe and Tom Smith of Nashville, John Tickle of Bristol, and Syreeta Vaughn and Tim Williams of Knoxville. Biology Professor Louis Gross and Student Government Association President Ovi Kabir are also board members.

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For the second consecutive year, a University of Tennessee College of Law team won the Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity International’s Mock Trial Competition.

During the competition on Feb. 22 and 23 in Arlington, Virginia, two UT College of Law teams, consisting of four students each, competed against 26 other teams. The winning team of second-year student Donovan Justice, and first year students Emily Carnder, Cole Hodge, and Natalie Loless, argued a fictional case in which a man faced six counts of second-degree murder and pled insanity as his defense.

The UT College of Law’s winning team argued on behalf of the defendant in two of the four rounds of the competition and twice as the prosecution. Justice took away top honors for best advocate overall.

Justice said the many hours of practice the team put in while preparing for the competition are what led to the group’s success.

“Running trials against teammates who are smart, dedicated, and willing to call you out on your mistakes, makes everyone a better lawyer,” he said. But “no amount of lectures and reading can replace actually standing in front of a court and arguing your case.”

The Phi Alpha Delta mock trial competition helps students develop their trial advocacy skills and requires students to form persuasive arguments and demonstrate their abilities in problem solving, public speaking, and critical thinking. The competition is judged by volunteer lawyers, judges, and mock trial competition veterans.

The second team of UT College of Law competitors that participated in the competition included third-year student Maggy Greenway, second-year student Kristen Anderson, and first-year students Rachel Tom-Quinn, and Avery Morelock. Tom-Quinn placed third as best witness of the competition.

The teams were coached by Melissa DiRado of the Knox County Public Defender’s Office.
Throughout her 20 years of experience on the bench, North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley has brought compassion and empathy that comes from a sincere concern for people.

Story by Rachel Wedding McClelland
Photos by Patrick Murphy-Racy and Paul Woolverton
Video interview at law.utk.edu/cheribeasley
Cheri Beasley had just finished her freshman year at Rutgers Douglass College for women, majoring in economics and political science, when she returned to her hometown of Nashville for the summer of 1985.

Nashville was, of course, home to the country music scene even then, she recalls. The city, like Beasley herself, was “sort of up and coming in a lot of ways,” she said, and “it didn’t really have a lot of big city problems.”

So during one of her drives through the city, she was surprised to see a sign of poverty and destitution that she hadn’t noticed before.

“I remember seeing a homeless person” sitting on a sidewalk, she said. “And that’s not something I really grew up seeing.”

The scene left an impression on her so much so that when she graduated three years later with a bachelor’s degree she considered pursuing an advanced degree in public health or social work. But instead, she decided she might best prepare herself to help others by studying the law.

It’s a decision she hasn’t regretted.

“I guess in part it was probably my service as an assistant public defender and my work as a trial judge that really led me to be interested in legal aid and indigent defense,” she said. “So much of my service … really helped me to see life and people in a very different way and have a very different kind of appreciation for the kinds of challenges a lot of families face.”

On March 7, 2019, Beasley attained a level of success she never anticipated. After spending 20 years in judicial roles — first as a judge in the 12th Judicial District in Fayetteville, North Carolina, then as a North Carolina Court of Appeals judge, then as a North Carolina State Supreme Court associate justice — Beasley became the 29th chief justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina.

Throughout her investiture ceremony, colleagues praised her for her steady and consistent work in the legal profession.

“She has the talent, the temperament, the experience, and the ability to take on this enormous task,” North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said. “She is one of a select group of great North Carolinians who have brought their talents, their knowledge and their love for North Carolina to their work.”

North Carolina Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Paul Newby commended Beasley on her service to the judiciary system highlighting her commitments to mentoring, lecturing and assisting bar organizations and civic groups.

“She’s been a tireless advocate for the importance of an independent judiciary and a fair judicial system that equally and consistently applies the law to every case. It’s been an honor to serve with her on the court for the last six years,” Newby said. “She’s a dedicated public servant, a fair and impartial jurist, and a kind and thoughtful colleague.”

Several weeks after the ceremonies that made her the center of so much attention, Beasley said she still finds herself in a state of disbelief.

“If anybody had said to me, you know, 20 years ago, or when I was a law student at the University of Tennessee College of Law, that I would be serving as the chief justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, I am not sure that I would have believed them,” she said.

In addition to holding the highest judicial office in North Carolina, Beasley now leads the state’s judicial branch of government. While that responsibility is enormous, Beasley sees it as an opportunity to affect positive change in the lives of those who need assistance.

“It wasn’t until 1974 that the first female justice was elected to the court, and only seven more have followed. In 1983, the first African American justice joined the court and only six more have followed.

In order to affect change.

“We know that most law schools admit about 50% women and 50% men. And then once law students go out to be professionals and practice in various areas, especially in large law firms, we know what the statistics look like. It’s not 50-50,” she said. “As difficult as that can be for women and others, the ratios for African Americans are far less encouraging.”

Beasley believes those in legal education and the legal profession must take the initiative to engage in open dialogue and honest conversation about racial, sexual, and religious differences in order to affect change.

“The reality for all of us is that we have to learn each other differently, and we have to be intentional about that,” she said. “As I think about some of the women judges that I look up to, and I hear them tell stories about being one, two, three, four or five of the women in a whole class of law students not all that long ago, it is just mind-boggling in so many ways. There’s more room to improve, but thankfully, we’ve come a long way.”

Newby commended Beasley on her service to the judiciary.

North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley received congratulations from fellow justices during her investiture ceremony in Raleigh, North Carolina on March 7, 2019.
North Carolina Supreme Court Justices are elected to hold their positions for a period of eight years, and Beasley’s term ends Jan. 1, 2021. That means she’ll begin a campaign for re-election in the next few months.

Having run for election four other times, she’s a seasoned campaigner. She became pregnant with twin sons while serving as a North Carolina District Court judge and “was waddling on the bench,” she said.

When the boys were just 18 months old, she recalls going door to door pushing a tandem stroller and carrying a diaper bag while asking for votes.

“I remember specifically my opponent at the time, whom I am long friends with at this time, campaigned on the notion that since my boys were young, I probably wouldn’t get out there and work hard to keep the seat,” she said. “That’s kind of all mama bear needs to hear.”

The tenacity and determination that have taken her through that episode, and so many others like it along the way, have her looking to the future with equal determination.

“The beauty of service is that we all come to the table with our own respective experiences, and the other beauty is the more diverse we are, the more representative we are of the people who we serve,” she said. “I’m pleased with where I am, and I’m excited about serving as chief justice, and we’ll see what the future holds.

“But this is pretty doggone awesome.”

North Carolina Chief Justice Cheri Beasley

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North Carolina Chief Justice Cheri Beasley

“Work That Makes a Difference”

INTERVIEWS WITH ALUMNI WHO ARE IMPACTING THE WORLD

ASHLEY ADAMS (‘11)
JUAN QUEVEDO (‘16)
KIRSTEN JACOBSON (‘16)
MICHELE JOHNSON (‘94)
BETH FORD (‘77)
WILLIE SANTANA (‘14)
RACHEL M. MOSES (‘02)

Watch the video interview at law.utk.edu/CheriBeasley
Whether they are defending the rights of inmates, arguing for changes in state and federal legislation, representing immigrants facing deportation, or serving low-income offenders who could not otherwise find adequate representation, public interest attorneys face some of the profession’s most challenging legal work.

But just ask those lawyers how satisfying their work is.

We did. And in the following pages, you’ll find some of the stories of University of Tennessee College of Law graduates whose positions allow them to serve their communities in compelling and inspiring ways.

You’ll find that their reasons for doing the work they do are as varied as their areas of practice. Ashley Adams shares how her father’s legal troubles laid the groundwork for her career choices and motivated her to bring about change for the convicted. Michele Johnson, devastated when two of her cousins with physical disabilities were institutionalized and eventually died, committed to finding ways to keep families together for the benefit of all. Beth Ford shares how she finds fulfillment advocating for changes in the law that can help restore families together for the benefit of all. Beth Ford shares how she finds fulfillment advocating for changes in the law that can help restore families together for the benefit of all.

What binds together the stories of these world-changing advocates is the level of satisfaction that public interest work brings to their lives, and the sense of pride they have in using their law degrees the way they envisioned they would when they entered law school. Their work does more than provide them with a paycheck. Their rewards come in their commitment to their purpose and their ability to leave situations better than they found them.

With their clients often at the forefront of their minds, these advocates admit they sometimes struggle with work-life balance, and they take to heart the disappointments that come when the victories they thought they had won are undermined by a new law or court ruling.

But they all agree that the need is so much greater than the service that is being provided. And they have no doubt that theirs is work that truly makes a difference.

When I stepped out of this line of work for 10 months, that’s what convinced me this is where I needed to be. Nothing else captures my attention like this. This work is what drives me and gets me out of bed in the morning. It’s nice to know when I get up that I will spend my day being of service to others.

What are some of the frustrations that come with this work?

People not understanding why you do it. Other lawyers don’t know how you do it. But we all took the same courses in criminal procedure and constitutional law. I don’t know how they can’t do it. It’s kind of sad. Everyone has rights and no matter what they did, they deserve to have their rights respected and implemented even when they did or were accused of doing horrible things. There are rights they still retain. And someone has to stand up for them. They are in a position where people don’t listen to them because of poverty or skin color. We are in a position as lawyers to help them. People don’t realize how easily we can all have our rights violated and how our privilege protects us from being heard or not heard.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

Knowing that you’re helping someone. I don’t see my work as something that is ever harming the world in the end. So it’s good to wake up and feel my work isn’t harmful and benefits all of us. If we respect the rights of the poor and those who are trampled on, we’re protecting the rights of everyone. If you’re deciding to take someone’s rights away based on poverty, skin color, sex, sexuality, you’re allowing a crack to open that would be really hard to close because you’re making decisions based on things people can’t help. If you can save someone’s life, that’s a really rewarding thing to accomplish. Getting someone off of death row is a tremendous feeling, and knowing that happened because of the work you do … what could be better?

If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

Be prepared to be emotionally, physically, and spiritually challenged. This profession needs people who are sympathetic and who care and understand. Everyone has a story – even people who do really horrible things. It is work that may take years to see a reward. It is work that causes you to experience tremendous losses. So set boundaries for yourself. Eight years out of law school, I’m still working on knowing when to take a break, when something is too much and I need to step away. On this job, you might not eat, sleep, or step away from office, and if that happens you know your professional life is being hurt. It’s better to experience tremendous losses. So set boundaries for yourself.

Describe the work you do and what a day on the job might involve.

I do a little of everything. My legal work involves working with inmates on death row through appeals or investigations into prison conditions. I do prison visits and talk with inmates about various conditions in the facilities. I do work on race and poverty projects, such as soil collections and marker installations for victims of racial terror lynchings. I also work with the Equal Justice Initiative’s Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice staff. I travel to do presentations about our work to get people educated on how to contextualize the criminal justice system in the race and poverty narrative.

Why have you made advocacy such an important part of your legal career?

I love it. I’ve been involved in advocacy work pretty much since I graduated in 2011, but the criminal defense world has always been a part of my life. My dad went to prison when I was 12, and he’s now 21 years of a life-term sentence in Georgia.

I didn’t get into this work because I thought I could help my dad. I knew that getting targeted with family in legal troubles is always messy. But I wanted to be a part of the type of work that could help my dad, or maybe help someone else’s dad.

As an undergraduate, I majored in sociology because I was fascinated by people and human behavior and how different environments affect behavior. Courses in mental health, criminology, and family dynamics were always what interested me most and those courses stuck with me.

Why are some of the rewards that come with this work?

Knowing that you’re helping someone. I don’t see my work as something that is ever harming the world in the end. So it’s good to wake up and feel my work isn’t harmful and benefits all of us. If we respect the rights of the poor and those who are trampled on, we’re protecting the rights of everyone. If you’re deciding to take someone’s rights away based on poverty, skin color, sex, sexuality, you’re allowing a crack to open that would be really hard to close because you’re making decisions based on things people can’t help. If you can save someone’s life, that’s a really rewarding thing to accomplish. Getting someone off of death row is a tremendous feeling, and knowing that happened because of the work you do … what could be better?

If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

Be prepared to be emotionally, physically, and spiritually challenged. This profession needs people who are sympathetic and who care and understand. Everyone has a story – even people who do really horrible things. It is work that may take years to see a reward. It is work that causes you to experience tremendous losses. So set boundaries for yourself. Eight years out of law school, I’m still working on knowing when to take a break, when something is too much and I need to step away. On this job, you might not eat, sleep, or step away from office, and if that happens you can become burnt out bitter and cynical. You don’t operate well as a lawyer when you feel this way, and clients deserve healthy lawyers. So work hard to keep yourself and your state of mind healthy.
Juan Quevedo ('16)
STAFF ATTORNEY WITH THE BRONX DEFENDERS' IMMIGRATION PRACTICE, BRONX, NEW YORK

Describe the work you do and what a day on the job might involve.

I provide free legal representation to low-income immigrants facing deportation in the City of New York, as well as detained New Yorkers facing deportation in the nearby immigration courts in New Jersey. I handle all aspects of deportation proceedings, including bond hearings, applications for cancellation of removal, asylum and related relief, adjustment of status and hardship waivers, applications to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals, and support for habeas petitions to federal district court. In addition, I research and write motions, develop case theories, and prepare oral arguments. I sometimes attend pre-trial conferences at immigration courts and attend detention hearings across the five boroughs.

Why have you made advocacy such an important part of your legal career?

I grew up in Southern California and went to a university for undergraduate school where 80 percent of the students were Latin American. I witnessed struggles certain people were having due to their immigration status, and that always stuck with me. Under current law, low-income people in immigration detention do not have a right to an attorney if they can't afford one. I believe, however, that every person in immigration detention deserves representation regardless of income, criminal history, or relief eligibility.

What are some of the frustrations that come with this work?

Sometimes, there's nothing we can do. The law is what it is. It provides only certain forms of relief for people who meet certain criteria. So there are a limited number of things that we can do for people to help them. It is heartbreaking for me to meet clients that are otherwise great people, but there is no way to help them. Our immigration laws operate exactly the way they are written and that means we can provide relief for some people and not supply relief for others. And that's just the way it is.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

It is gratifying for me to help people who are vulnerable understand what their rights are within immigration and outside of it. I represent a lot of fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. Being able to keep the family together is one of the most satisfying things about this job. In addition, advocating for release on bond reduces that amount of time my clients spend in immigration custody. I help lower the social and economic costs of homelessness, foster care, and unemployment created by immigration detentions and avoidable removals.

Kirsten Jacobson ('16)
STAFF ATTORNEY, TENNESSEE ALLIANCE FOR LEGAL SERVICES, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Describe the work you do and what a day on the job might involve.

The Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services works to strengthen the delivery of civil legal help in Tennessee. My role involves leveraging new technology to help Tennesseans access the civil legal resources available across the state. We operate a statewide civil legal helpline and provide limited scope legal advice and referrals on civil legal matters. As a companion to the helpline, Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services provides HELP4TN.org which contains links to legal information booklets, self-help videos, court approved forms, and resources. I am working with the Administrative Office of the Courts to install HELP4TN.org kiosks in courts throughout the state, so that there are resources and information available where people need legal information. We are also about to launch the first-ever civil legal help chatbot which will offer legal information and forms through HELP4TN.org.

If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

Why have you made advocacy such an important part of your legal career?

I think it is important to be invested in your community, and my work allows me to do that every day. Working on our helpline and on TN Free Legal Answers allows me to provide legal advice to people that may not otherwise be able to get help. Working on new projects like the Legal Wellness Checkup and the HELP4TN chatbot gives me the opportunity to be creative and problem-solve in new ways.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

One reward is the impact that access to justice work in Tennessee has on our communities, and being able to be part of that work. It is so impressive to see the data that comes from our work. Our helpline has served over 20,000 Tennesseans and TN Free Legal Answers has served over 15,000 Tennesseans. It is also impressive to me how Tennessee is viewed as a leader in innovative access to justice work. There are lawyers in all different types of practice settings working together to help make legal help more accessible, and I really appreciate the opportunity to be a part of and learn from this community.

If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

I think it is important to be connected to your community, and be ready to think creatively and problem solve. When I started at Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, I had an Equal Justice Works fellowship which was a great way to launch my career. That opportunity allowed me to create my own project and helped design my role.

I created and train people how to use the Legal Wellness Checkup, which identifies potential legal issues and provides users with links to resources they may find helpful. I am also the state administrator for TN Free Legal Answers, our online legal advice clinic. This role involves monitoring the questions posted to the site, recruiting and training new volunteers, and working with volunteers to organize groups of attorneys to answer questions. I work frequently with law students to organize these “clinics” — including about three per semester at UT Law.
Describe the work you do and what a day on the job might involve.

We focus on improving the laws, policies, and programs that provide security, dignity, and opportunity to families struggling with illness or financial trouble. We also train health care providers, social service providers, and community leaders to ensure that those in their communities can get what they need.

- We help Tennesseans navigate complicated systems to get health care and food. Our one-on-one service to vulnerable Tennesseans allows us to stay close to the people impacted by policies; their courage, experience, and voice drives all of our system-focused work.

- We train health care providers, social workers and local community groups to better understand the complex healthcare system and the laws that govern it.

- When systemic issues affect lots of people, we find the root cause and address the laws, practices, and policies that create those issues. Sometimes, current policies stand in the way of our state’s ability to honor the rights and dignity of every Tennessean. In these cases, our legal team works to achieve systemic change through the courts. We also help regular Tennesseans with the tools they need to understand legislation and public policy, and to make their voices heard on issues that affect them.

What do you think are the core skills that one needs to have in order to be an effective advocate?

When systemic issues affect lots of people, we find the root cause and address the laws, practices, and policies that create those issues. Sometimes, current policies stand in the way of our state’s ability to honor the rights and dignity of every Tennessean. In these cases, our legal team works to achieve systemic change through the courts. We also help regular Tennesseans with the tools they need to understand legislation and public policy, and to make their voices heard on issues that affect them.

Why have you made advocacy such an important part of your legal career?

I was raised in a big Catholic family and at a young age was shaped by the experience of two cousins born with severe intellectual and physical disabilities who had to be institutionalized in order to get their health needs met. They desperately wanted to be with the rest of their family and their mother was heartbroken to leave them, but it was the only way that their health needs could be addressed. They both died in their teens of preventable causes common to people who are institutionalized. I decided on that day, at the age of 8, that the system shouldn’t divide families and should give every child a chance to thrive at home. I decided to spend my career making sure that when I get up that I will spend my day being of service to others.

What are some of the frustrations that come with this work?

- We are always outnumbered and out-resourced.

- Lasting change is slow. It is often so slow that it will be too late for the clients we love. Real change requires us to appeal to the light within others even on days when it feels unfair (and a smidge infuriating) that leaders’ harmful decisions are needlessly damaging the lives of precious Tennessee children.

- Often decisions are made based upon short sighted, self-interested politics and not on what decision makers know is best for the state or our kids.

- So much of public opinion is based upon myths and echo-chamber news watching. Folks blame the wrong people for their challenging plights. Sadly, too many people are driven in and distracted by division and fear, leaving so much potential power for good on the table.

- If you have loads of power, it’s easy to shoot the tiny & poor messengers. I have years of scares from said shootings. It’s much harder to engage in constructive problem solving. But as they say, you can’t clap with one hand. Finding ways to encourage our leaders to engage in solution-focused conversation is often difficult.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

- Winning a major policy reform; Feeling the power of being completely dependent on the goodness and righteousness of others; Hearing from your teenage children that they want to find a career where they can change the world.

- We help Tennesseans master the maze of health and nutrition resources. Our caseworkers help individuals navigate complicated systems to get health care and food. Our one-on-one service to vulnerable Tennesseans allows us to stay close to the people impacted by policies; their courage, experience, and voice drives all of our system-focused work.

- We train health care providers, social workers and local community groups to better understand the complex healthcare system and the laws that govern it.

- We also work directly with TennCare and other public programs to make sure that services are available and work as expected.
Describe the work you do and what a day on the job might involve.

As the federal defender for the Eastern District of Tennessee and the executive director of a non-profit with a multi-million-dollar annual budget, none of my days are the same. Nor are many of my days what I thought they would be when the alarm went off in the morning.

A Day in the Life of the head of a federal defender organization might include a meeting with the court clerk, probation office, and United States Attorney’s office to negotiate the handling of several hundred motions expected to be filed under the First Step Act, a task which involves advocacy for a whole class of clients. That meeting might be followed by a lunch and a task which involves advocacy for a whole class of motions expected to be filed under the First Step Act, or sometimes, it might simply be when the alarm went off in the morning.

Why have you made advocacy such an important part of your legal career?

I have a passion to be the voice for the voiceless, to be sure that people are not judged by what they might have done on the worst day of their lives, and to work to protect and preserve the Bill of Rights, particularly the Sixth Amendment, for all of us.

What are some of the frustrations that come with this work?

Bad legislation and bad case law can happen so quickly, but positive change for the criminal justice system usually comes very slowly. Issues have to be developed and move through the Courts. Comprehensive reform takes time. Changing culture seems to take forever.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

Having a panel lawyer call and say that she got a good result because of the training that our office provided. Hugging a former client who was released 10 years earlier than she thought that she would be because of a change in the law that came through the work of our office. Knowing that our clients are receiving the best representation possible.

If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

This is the best job ever. Seek out mentors, take clinic and trial practice, do an externship or internship in a defender office. Be nice to people and network. And look for a first job that will give you courtroom experience.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

As a prosecutor, I loved doing my job because I love the law and enjoy seeking justice. The prosecutor’s role is special. A prosecutor’s job is to win the case, but to seek justice. Their responsibility is to the system.

As a public defender, I love my job because I love the law and enjoy seeking justice. One of the founding principles of this country is a staunch faith in the rule of law. If the rule of law means anything, it means that it is not just the citizens who must follow the law. The government must as well.

When I was a prosecutor my job was to seek justice. Often that meant holding private citizens accountable for violating the law. As a criminal defense lawyer, my job is to make sure the government does. So, I guess, the short answer is that I love our constitutions and serving people.

What are some of the frustrations that come with this work?

There’s not enough time. There are some legal issues that face my clients that I would love to flesh out. I have clients with cost-prohibitive bonds who choose to plead guilty to crimes the state may not be able to prove, just to get out of jail. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation takes a long time to process evidence, and I have clients whose lives are on hold for unreasonable time frames. Several of our sessions judges have created their own “sentencing guidelines” that treat all my clients the same and from which they do not deviate. I wish I had the time and resources to flesh out the legal issues associated with those, but I don’t. Any given day, my work resembles more of a crisis triage than it want it to be.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

Despite everything, the job can be fun and rewarding. For most of my clients, the issue I’m helping them with is the most important thing going on in their lives. We do good work for them, and it’s very rewarding to see justice being done.

If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

Do it, but do it with eyes open. The best two jobs I’ve had in my entire life have been as a public defender and prosecutor. Neither job is easy. Both are hard work. If you’re doing it right, both are tough and stressful (although for different reasons). We are not going to sit back in an office, working from 9 to 5, and watching the money rolling in.

Willie Santana (‘14)
ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER, THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT’S PUBLIC DEFENDERS OFFICE, MORRISTOWN, TENNESSEE

Describe the work you do and what a day on the job might involve.

Most days, I arrive at the office between 7:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. Hamblen County Sessions Court Division I (Criminal) holds court Monday through Thursday and occasionally on Fridays. Two assistant public defenders cover court the days it is in session, so I’m in court on average two to three days a week.

On days that I’m covering sessions court, I will walk to the courthouse early and try to review the files for the clients we have been appointed to represent. On any given day, we represent about a dozen clients in the morning docket and about as many in the afternoon. The cases range from “dog at large” misdemeanors to class A felonies.

On days that I’m not scheduled in sessions court, I’m either preparing for the next term of criminal court (our criminal court judges are only here three times a year in March, July, and November) or dealing with issues from the last term of criminal court. Those days typically involve trips to the Hamblen County Jail, returning voicemails, meeting with clients, or reviewing discovery disclosures. We do a little of our own investigating from time to time as well, as our district only has one full-time investigator and one part-time. There’s barely enough time to do everything I am assigned 23 felony cases in the March 2019 term and about as many for the July 2019 cases.

What are some of the frustrations that come with this work?

There are some legal issues that face my clients that I would love to flesh out. I have clients with cost-prohibitive bonds who choose to plead guilty to crimes the state may not be able to prove, just to get out of jail. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation takes a long time to process evidence, and I have clients whose lives are on hold for unreasonable time frames. Several of our sessions judges have created their own “sentencing guidelines” that treat all my clients the same and from which they do not deviate. I wish I had the time and resources to flesh out the legal issues associated with those, but I don’t. Any given day, my work resembles more of a crisis triage than it want it to be.

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If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

Do it, but do it with eyes open. The best two jobs I’ve had in my entire life have been as a public defender and prosecutor. Neither job is easy. Both are hard work. If you’re doing it right, both are tough and stressful (although for different reasons). We are not going to sit back in an office, working from 9 to 5, and watching the money rolling in.
Describe the work you do and what a day on the job might involve.

I represent low-income individuals from 10 counties in the Upper Cumberland region of middle Tennessee with a variety of civil legal problems, such as obtaining divorces and Orders of Protection for victims of domestic violence, representing children with disabilities in special education matters, protecting consumers’ rights in debt collection cases or asserting protections under the Consumer Protection Act, handling administrative agency appeals regarding public benefits like TennCare (Medicaid), Food Stamps, Families First (TANF), and Social Security, and assisting taxpayers in both administrative and court actions against the IRS in Federal income tax controversies.

I often must travel among the counties multiple days per week for Court to conduct agency hearings or to meet clients who do not have the ability to travel to my office. When I am in my office, I have frequent meetings with clients and phone calls to opposing parties/attorneys and spend much time drafting pleadings and correspondence. I participate in many conference calls per month with other Legal Aid attorneys within my firm and across the state who practice the same types of cases as I do.

Why have you made advocacy such an important part of your legal career?

First, I truly believe it was my calling to be a voice for people who would not have one if it weren’t for me. There are so many injustices that happen every day, especially to low-income individuals, and it is professionally and personally rewarding to be able to bring attention to and attempt to correct as many of those injustices through advocacy.

Second, I love being challenged, and despite practicing for 16 years in the same firm and in the same communities, my work as an advocate always keeps me on my toes because of new legal issues and new factual scenarios that always pop up. Every time I think I have seen it all, a new client comes in with a whole new issue that requires new analysis.

What are some of the frustrations that come with this work?

You don’t always win when you think you should. Also, the laws don’t always make sense, especially to our clients. So sometimes it can be frustrating to explain to a client why they don’t have a good legal case. It’s also hard to say no to cases, and sometimes you can get too many cases at the same time which makes it hard to balance life and work.

What are some of the rewards that come with this work?

Correcting injustices as well as empowering a client who felt like they had no power or no chance before they came to you.

If you could talk to law students who are considering a similar career path, what would you tell them about your work in advocacy and what advice would you give them?

I feel lucky to be a legal aid attorney because I wake up every day knowing my goal is to help someone, or many someones, who have no one else to help them. It’s rewarding, inspiring, and fulfilling, even when it’s frustrating. You’re not going to get financially rich by being a legal aid attorney so you must make some sacrifices if you truly want to work for a nonprofit. And starting to practice as an attorney with any type of firm will be hard because you quickly realize what you did not learn about practicing as an attorney. Try to take as many trial practice classes as possible in law school. And get involved in as many clinical experiences as you can, through the clinics offered at the law school, the UT Pro Bono projects, and through any available internships you can find in the summer, so you can hopefully gain some experience in the courtroom.

Rachel M. Moses (’02)
STAFF ATTORNEY, LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE AND THE CUMBERLANDS (COOKEVILLE OFFICE)

Alumni commit to serving Tennessee residents by implementing a service to better provide legal aid.
During their lunch hour at the University of Tennessee College of Law, nearly 30 students are huddled in a classroom around laptop computers in groups of three or four. The groups of students, who voluntarily spend their lunch hours at these meetings, are joined by a law professor or Knoxville-based attorney who offers advice, feedback, and direction about questions raised by would-be clients.

“You never know what sorts of questions are going to come up that need an answer,” Professor Joan Heminway said. “So this becomes a collaborative feedback loop that turns into an effective learning conversation for the students.”

The questions originate on a website called TN.FreeLegalAnswers.org. Through the site, Tennessee residents who meet specific guidelines can ask non-criminal legal questions of lawyers. The questions rarely lead to formal representation in court, and no one is paid for their services. But through this exercise, those who need legal assistance the most, who are least likely to be able to afford it, can get some of the answers they need.

About half of the questions submitted through the site have to do with family law and are related to divorce, child custody, or conservatorship disputes. Other common questions are linked to landlord-tenant conflict, healthcare, or credit issues. While licensed attorneys are responsible for answering the questions, at the UT College of Law those attorneys are involving students by advising and mentoring them as they work together to research solutions to clients’ questions.

“I am licensed to practice law in the state of Tennessee and that license is on the line,” Heminway said. “So the advice we give will be well thought out. Students are learning in a very practical way how to relate statutes and case law to problems people are encountering in Tennessee.”

While TN Free Legal Answers is a tool the College of Law uses to give students experience with pro bono service and representation, it isn’t exclusively a UT product. But it was conceived by a UT graduate.

Offering legal advice on a virtual platform was little more than a dream 10 years ago. The challenge of ensuring client confidentiality on an easily accessible public website seemed insurmountable. But the Tennessee Bar was eager to find a way to make pro bono attorneys more available to their potential clients.

“We always had a time and space problem making lawyers accessible for pro bono work when people with need could be there,” said University of Tennessee College of Law graduate and Larry Wilks Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, Buck Lewis, an attorney with the Baker Donelson law firm.

Lewis, who in 2010 was part of the Tennessee Supreme Court’s Access to Justice Commission, said the need for online legal answers became overwhelmingly apparent when flooding in Nashville claimed nearly 30 lives and damaged nearly 11,000 properties, displacing 10,000 people from their homes.

“People really needed help,” Lewis said. “So we started thinking about whether there was a way to create a system for low-income clients to post questions and receive an email response from an attorney.”

The technology team at Lewis’s law firm developed the software, Lewis said, and “eventually we came up with Online TN Justice, and that eventually became TN Free Legal Answers.”

Within five years of the launch of Online TN Justice, attorneys had answered 10,000 questions through the network, Lewis said.
As the first state to offer its residents a direct line to pro bono advice from licensed attorneys, Tennessee became a role model.

Lewis’s connections with the American Bar Association led the organization to develop the website ABAFreeLegalAnswers.org on which all states now have the option of creating a page to host their own legal answers site. The initial goal was to launch networks in 25 states. Forty-two states, Puerto Rico and The Virgin Islands have now signed licensing agreements, and England and Wales are expected to launch in 2019.

“It’s pretty amazing that this project that Buck Lewis dreamed up has so dramatically expanded opportunities nationally for people to get legal help and for lawyers to volunteer,” said Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services Executive Director Ann Pruitt, also a UT College of Law graduate. “It’s now in 40+ states and supported by the American Bar Association.”

The Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS) - a statewide non-profit hub for civil justice issues - now oversees the activity of the TN Free Legal Answers network, monitors questions that are posed, helps attorneys sign up to use the site, and encourages law schools, corporations and individuals to engage in pro bono work.

Pruitt said TN Free Legal Answers provides a tool for helping law students develop their passion for serving the underserved. One student recently told Pruitt, “It was heartbreaking and eye opening to see just how common issues such as homelessness, unemployment, discrimination and inadequate childcare are for citizens in Tennessee,” she said.

With the help of TN Free Legal Answers, 1,561 low income Tennesseans found answers to their legal questions in 2018, Pruitt said.

At the UT College of Law, pairing students to work with TN Free Legal Answers is part of second-year law student Kristen Anderson’s responsibility. Anderson, who entered law school with a desire to learn to practice public interest law, worked with TALS during spring break of her first year.

She now coordinates the student pro bono effort at UT Law and partners with TALS about what questions need to be answered during the pro bono clinics.

“Unlike anything we’re doing in the classroom, this is something that gives students exposure to issues they would not see otherwise,” Anderson said. “In classes, you don’t get to see what real people are facing and how they need help.”

In addition to her pro bono work, Anderson works in the public defender’s office, but she says the heavy workload is worth it.

“This keeps me sane,” she said. “These issues are very centered and very real. In class, we’re dealing with big picture, federal issues. But this – this is real life. This is what we’ll face in practice every day, and it’s teaching us what to do to get answers for our clients.”

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Chidimma Nwaneri is determined to help Nigerian girls access the education they deserve.
When a girl is born in Nigeria, the path for her life is often bleak, by American standards. Even though Nigerian law dictates that education is free and mandatory for all Nigerian boys and girls between the ages of six and 15, Nigerian Secretary of Education Adamu Hussaini estimated in 2017 that 10.5 million children in the country were either not enrolled or not regularly attending school.

“Illiteracy levels are extremely high and higher for girls because if your parents don’t have enough money they will train the boys, but not the girls,” said University of Tennessee College of Law third-year student Chidimma Nwaneri. “I want to ensure that more girls get educated. I just want more girls to have better futures.”

Nwaneri will graduate from the College of Law in May, having attained a level of education many of her childhood friends may never comprehend. As a girl born in Iomo State, Nigeria and raised in Abuja, she was one of the fortunate ones. Her grandparents were committed to educating their children, she said.

“That’s how my mom was able to go to university to law school and become an attorney,” Nwaneri said. “My dad was a politician, and so he also knew how important education is. They always instilled that into all of us that we would get our college degree in the U.S. and get a graduate degree.”

Nwaneri and her siblings have taken seriously the opportunity they’ve been given to study in the United States. All four of them left Nigeria after graduating from high school. Her two brothers have pursued undergraduate and medical degrees, while her sister is working to obtain an MBA. Nwaneri graduated cum laude from Tennessee State University in 2014 with a degree in political science.

After Nwaneri finishes law school and completes the law degree in political science.

Nwaneri’s long-term goal is to establish a boarding school in Nigeria. But her experience in the College of Law’s Community Economic Development Clinic, in which she worked with a client who was starting a non-profit organization in Kenya, helped Nwaneri establish a short-term goal to first create a non-profit that will subsidize girls’ tuition costs.

“I know how to start a non-profit now, and in general, I just want to help more girls get educated,” she said. “I want to follow in my mom’s footsteps and create a way for more people to provide sponsorships.”

Legal Clinic Professor Eric Amarante helped Nwaneri develop and modify her ideas for creating a non-profit.

“I have little doubt that she will open a school for girls,” Amarante said. “She has realistic goals that are modest and attainable. She certainly has the personality and the dedication to get it done. I think her chances of success are very good.”

But Nwaneri isn’t working under any false illusions. She understands that the road ahead of her will be difficult, and that her successes will be hard won.

“People will raise obstacles; they’ll say ‘who does she think she is coming from a family like her own and coming to tell us how to take care of kids?’ I will face fathers who will say ‘No, you’re not going to send my kid to school,’” she said. “But that’s not going to deter me.”

“I’m still going to do it.”

“BUT THAT’S NOT GOING TO DETER ME. I’M STILL GOING TO DO IT!”

PAULA SCHAEFER SELECTED AS ASSOCIATE DEAN OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

University of Tennessee College of Law Professor Paula Schaefer has been named the college’s associate dean for academic affairs.

Schaefer, who joined the faculty of the College of Law in 2008, has taught courses in professional responsibility, civil procedure, e-discovery, pre-trial litigation, and behavioral legal ethics. As a lawyer, she practiced in the area of business litigation. She also coordinates and co-teaches the Semester in Residence in Nashville and focuses on developing innovative teaching methods to prepare students for practice. From 2011-2014, she chaired the committee that reviewed and proposed changes that have now been integrated into the 1L curriculum.

Schaefer’s scholarship considers issues of attorney ethics, fiduciary duty, and behavioral legal ethics, and she writes in the area of legal education reform, with a focus on professionalism issues.

Her research has been published in the Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics, the Maryland Law Review, the Florida State University Law Review, and others. She is one of many authors of the book “Building on Best Practices: Transforming Legal Education in a Changing World.”


Schaefer assumed her position Jan. 1, 2019.

RENEE ALLEN
Academic Success Director
Academic Success Director

ERIC FRANKLIN AMARANTE
Professor Eric Franklin
Amarante was named the Willamette Research Professor for 2019 based on his article

BEN BARTON
Professor Ben Barton was named the college’s associate dean for academic affairs. He will serve as chair during 2020.

ROB BLITT
Professor Rob Blitt’s article

DEAN BLAIR
Professor Dean Blair was named the college’s associate dean for academic affairs. He will serve as chair during 2020.

WENDY BACH
Professor Wendy Bach’s article

BRAD ARHEART
Professor Brad Arheart’s article

DOUG BLAZER
The annual Association of American Law Schools conference in New Orleans, Dean Emeritus and Professor Doug Blair was elected as chair-elect for the leadership section. He remains on the executive committee of the AALS and will serve as chair during 2020.

TERRY DUNN BAXTER
Associate Dean and Professor

BOB BLITT
Professor Rob Blitt’s article

WENDY BACH
Professor Wendy Bach’s article

RENEE ALLEN
Academic Success Director

DOUG BLAZER
Professor Doug Blair’s article

TERRY DUNN BAXTER
Associate Dean and Professor

WENDY BACH
Professor Wendy Bach’s article

DOUG BLAZER
Professor Doug Blair’s article

TERRY DUNN BAXTER
Associate Dean and Professor

WENDY BACH
Professor Wendy Bach’s article

DOUG BLAZER
Professor Doug Blair’s article
GREGORY STEIN BECOMES AMERICAN BAR FOUNDATION FELLOW

The American Bar Foundation has selected Professor Gregory Stein as a fellow. In order to be considered for the honor, individuals must have demonstrated extraordinary leadership in the legal profession.

Professor Stein joined the university of Tennessee faculty in 1999 after practicing law with Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison in New York. His practice experience covered various aspects of real estate finance and development and land use, and he currently teaches courses in these areas.

His scholarship in these fields has been published in numerous law journals, including those at Ohio State, Pepperdine, Tennessee, Vanderbilt, Vermont, Washington, and Washington & Lee.

He also is the co-author of a book, now in its third edition, that helps attorneys develop their expertise in commercial real estate law. He served as associate dean for faculty development at the College of Law from 2009 through 2016.

American Bar Foundation fellows are a global honorary society of attorneys, judges, law faculty, and legal scholars whose public and private careers have demonstrated outstanding dedication to the highest principles of the legal profession and to the welfare of their communities.

Membership is limited to one percent of lawyers licensed to practice in each jurisdiction, and fellows are recommended by their peers and elected by the board of the American Bar Foundation.

PENNY WHITE RECEIVES SEC FACULTY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

College of Law Professor Penny White has been recognized for her work with a 2019 SEC Faculty Achievement Award.

White, the Elvin E. Overton Distinguished Professor of Law, serves as director of the Center for Advocacy and Dispute Resolution at UT's College of Law. She teaches evidence, trial practice, pretrial litigation, and negotiation, and assists with the law school's various clinical and externship programs. She lectures around the country on these topics as well as capital punishment jurisprudence and ethics and professionalism issues.

“It’s an honor for UT to have one of the SEC's top professors among our faculty,” said Provost David Manderscheid. “Professor White's national reputation and extraordinary scholarship play a significant role not only in educating the next generation of legal experts but drawing promising new students to the school.”

White spent the first few weeks of the spring 2019 semester at Harvard University, teaching advocacy skills while partnering with lawyers and judges from all over the country.

Dean Melanie Wilson said White's extensive legal background and her contributions to the college, the community, and the state make her an excellent choice for this honor.

“Penny White is an incredible asset to the University of Tennessee. We are fortunate to have someone of her caliber preparing our students. Her excellence is undeniable, and her commitment to legal education is unmatched.”
Professor Eric Franklin Amarante has been named a Bellow Scholar for 2019-2020 by the American Association of Law Schools. Amarante is one of only seven law professors nationwide who will serve the next two years as a Bellow Scholar. His selection was announced in January during the annual meeting of the American Association of Law Schools in New Orleans.

Through the Bellow Scholar Program, clinical law professors are recognized and supported in their innovative research designed to improve the quality of justice in communities, enhance the delivery of legal services, and promote economic and social justice.

Amarante’s selection was based on his project proposal related to Unregulated Charity. He plans to study the organizational documents of streamlined application filers, and expand the National Taxpayer Advocate study by reviewing the organizational documents of all streamlined application filers in Tennessee.

Amarante’s project will become the focus of information sharing, discussion, and critique at the annual American Association of Law Schools Clinical Conference and at annual workshops organized by the Bellow Scholar Committee.

The Bellow Scholar Program was established in honor Professor Gary Bellow, a pioneering founder of modern clinical legal education.
TENNESSEE HALL SOCIETY

From the college’s original building, Tennessee Hall, at the corner of Cumberland and Poplar to our current location on Cumberland between 15th and 16th Streets, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga has always stood proudly as a beacon of educational excellence.

In the same way that the college’s building is a monument to education, TENNESSEE HALL SOCIETY of Chattanooga recognizes individuals and businesses that have established an endowed fund at UT Chattanooga to benefit the College of Business Administration.

Law is honored through this society that recognizes individuals and businesses that have established an endowed fund at UT Law.

CLASS OF 1974

Michael B. Swindle
CLASS OF 1977

John R. Thomas

CLASS OF 1980

Jonathan D. Bledsoe

CLASS OF 1982

Richard E. Laughter

CLASS OF 1984

Jeffrey E. Reaves

CLASS OF 1985

Scott L. Johnson

CLASS OF 1986

Jeffrey R. Bell

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Jeffrey E. Reaves

CLASS OF 1985

Scott L. Johnson

CLASS OF 1986

Jeffrey R. Bell
The Thomas J. Freeman Society, named for our first dean, recognizes individuals and families who, through their estate plans, have established a planned gift of any size benefiting the college. These future gifts can be bequeathed through a will or personal trust, or through one of several charitable life-income plans.

CLASS OF 1992
$4,675
Amanda & Stephen Young
Jill E. Nolan
Timothy & Midori Higgs
James & Amanda French
Jason W. Eagle

CLASS OF 1993
$4,400
Edward H. Batts II
Ron L. Ewert
Edward L. Daniel
Tommy Hagy
Chloe Red & Ronald Boudelle
R. Dale Thomas
William & Jan Styrer

CLASS OF 1993
$3,450
Elizabeth & Michael Chance
Douglas & Lisa Auken
George & Kathleen Anderson
Gregg & Brenda Edens
Edward & Nicola Clayton
Ellen & William Berez

CLASS OF 1997
$4,825
Philip & Loren West
Catherine M. Wilson
Keith & Joanie Stewart
Elizabeth & Jason Hood
Barbara E. Edens-Redmond
G. Keith & Sherri Alley

CLASS OF 1995
$2,200
Stuart F. Wilson-Patton
Robin B. Thomerson
J. Chad & Leslie Hatmaker
William R. Hannah
Edward & Nicole Clayton
Ellen & William Berez

CLASS OF 1999
$7,810
Amanda & Scott Sammons
Jonathan P. Michael
John & Jennifer Huisman

CLASS OF 2000
$5,605
Thomas J. Wolaver
Michael & April Berman
Ursula Bailey

CLASS OF 2001
$3,002.50
Stephanie J. Williams
Hanson & Elizabeth Tipton
Troy & Sarese Svihl
Shana Peete & Austin Verive
Deborah A. Josephs
Mary Beth Hagan
Jolyn & Jonathan Farber
Brett A. Cole
Robert & Cherie Chapski

CLASS OF 2002
$762.50
CLASS OF 2003
$3,540
Katie & Nathan Zipper
Jessica M. VanDyke
Michelle L. Quinn
Heather & Dustin Parker
Sarah & Kevin McGee
Joseph Jackson, II
Audrey M. Calkins
Michael & Emily Saylor
Sara & John Quinn
Hannah Lowe
Sally & Daniel Goade
Anthony M. Berry

CLASS OF 2004
$3,000
Andrew & Claudia Tillman
William Smith & Melanie Osburn
Sherry L. Paty
Melvin J. Malone
Elizabeth & Michael Chance

CLASS OF 2005
$3,000
Robert L. Gorham
Michael H. Hickey
J. Reginald Hill
Karen C. Ellis
Neal Fischer
John C. Hine

CLASS OF 2006
$2,500
Eric & Marcey Addington
Lowry & Jane Kline
Abraham J. Kalfus
Mary B. Hamm
Craig D. Mackey
Gianna Mai & Stephen Collins

CLASS OF 2007
$2,108
Tonya & Robert Thornton
Marissa & Manuel Russ
R. Brad Morgan
Betty & James Rhoades
Manuela & Robert Thornton
Mary & Dennis Schafer
Emily & Brian Wilburn

CLASS OF 2008
$2,000
Aeron L. Belville
Amy & Steve Sklar
Eric & Kenneth Kaplan
Sonja & Daniel Goade
Bobbi & Edward Parrish

CLASS OF 2009
$1,100
Richard & Donna Plumley
Benjamin C. Huddleston
Robert J. Delpriore, Jr.
Lisa & Jonathan Cole
Allison & James Cardwell

CLASS OF 2010
$1,100
David & Susan Odemstraat
Roy F. Satterwhite, III
Samantha & Christopher Stirn

CLASS OF 2011
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Thomas & Nancy Dillard
Thomas & Susan Dillard
Dickson & Judy Grissom
Gail Gray Cunningham

CLASS OF 2012
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Joanna & James A. Jenkins
Kathryn & Mark Somogyi
Thomas & Kimberly Harrington

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CLASS OF 2012
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In 1890, UT Law opened with only nine students and one faculty member, but from those humble beginnings an institution of excellence for the law was established.zc:

THOMAS J. FREEMAN SOCIETY

Eric & Marcey Addington
Howard & Charlotte Dunbar
Elizabeth Ford & Michael Driscoll
Keith & Tracy Fraizer
Mady Beth Hagan
Michael D. Kenan
Abraham J. Kalfus
Lowry & Jane Kline

Edward D. Langquist
Todd & Betty Lepage
Melvin J. Malone
Richard & Donna Plumley
Charles E. Reynolds
Phillip & Christy Sanders
Richard L. Rose
Frankie E. Wade

Michael & Jessica Schab
Emily & Brian Wilburn

Eric & Cherrie Chevali
Brett A. Cole
Effie V. Coster
Joly & Jonathan Farber
Mary Beth Hagan
Lukasena & Joseph Joseph
Sandra Peate & Austin Verive
Erin L. Hannon
Curtis & Lindsey Stinnett
Troy & Sarah Suire
Harson & Elizabeth Tipton
Rebecca & James Toile
Stephanie J. Williams

Josef & Ashley Ehlke
Sarah & Kevin McGee
Joseph Jackson, II
Audrey M. Calkins
Michael & Emily Saylor

Eric & Cherrie Chevali
Brett A. Cole
Effie V. Coster
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Lukasena & Joseph Joseph
Sandra Peate & Austin Verive
Erin L. Hannon
Curtis & Lindsey Stinnett
Troy & Sarah Suire
Harson & Elizabeth Tipton
Rebecca & James Toile

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CLASS OF 1890

Heard & Reina
Alison & James Campbell
Kathleen & Stephen Clark
Lisa & Jonathan Cole
Robert J. Deplanke
Garry & Virginia Ferris
Suzanne & Charles Fordham
Benjamin C. Huddlestone
Susan F. Johnson
Elizabeth H. Mills
Richard & Donna Plumley
B. Scott Ruth
Robby E. Smith
James & Ashley Williams

CLASS OF 1997
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CLASS OF 2012
$1,100

This page contains a table and a list of names. Each line in the table represents a contribution to the College Fund. The table includes the name of the contributor, the year of graduation, and the amount contributed. The list contains the names of individuals and families who have established charitable life-income plans or who have given $2,500 or more during the calendar year to the College Fund. The names are sorted alphabetically by the last name of the contributor or family member.
MAUDE RISEDEN HUGHETT & RBJ CAMPBELL JR. SOCIETY

MAUDE Riseden (1909) and RBJ Campbell (1956) were pioneers at UT Law as the first female graduate and the first black graduate, respectively. They helped establish the college’s foundation as a diverse and inclusive law school community.

Each year, the College of Law remembers our alumni who have passed away. They have all paved the way for today’s students.

IN MEMORIAM

CLASS OF 1982

Jas C. Inn
Victoria Pension
Olive Sanford
Lynn S. Seabrook
Jay M. Shutt
Margaret W. Smith
R. Neil Southern
Arlene Shrut & Gary Kendall
B. Neil Southern
Bill & Barbara Sipper
Peppy & Clyde Slade
Diane Sloane
Robert & Anne Taylor
Ann T. Taylor
Kris & Patrick Tobin
Charles Sharrett
Evan & Erica Sharber
Samuel L. Helton
Chanse J. Hayes
Jill C. Irvin
Samuel & Carley Ferguson
Suzannah Cannon
James & Allison Cardwell
WHITTIER CARTER
Gary J. Davis
Maryann James
Joseph & Patricia Johnson
Dan A. Davis
Bradley & Joyce Kerer
Walter C. Kurt
Allison Lester & Samuel Sherman
Brianne Lowitz
Mary Magil
Susan C. Martin
John Medall
Tanya C. McGinnis
Peppy & Catherine Neal
William & Catherine Neal
Alex B. Long
Michelle M. Kieson
Celeste N. Lambert
Don & Diane Leatherman
Alex B. Long
Sally & Hal
Rachel & Eric McCollum
Christina Monstein & Michael Homedahl
Stephanie A. Neal
Tammy R. Naff
Bethany E. Orthock
JillMarie D. Owen
Teresa & Gary Peterson
Thomas & Kathleen Pak
E. Joy Radke
Brenna & Peter Reubensam
Santina R. Rutan

CLASS OF 1983

Brennan Wingerter
Scott & Katherine McLeod
Maria E. Hunter
William P. Glascock
Matthew R. Johnson
Kirsten Jacobson
Erika L. Hughes
Moradian
Michael Hromadka & Christina
Kendell M. Garrett
Casey Duhart
James S. Cook
Brian Bush
John T. Baxter
$3,831.80

CLASS OF 2013

Brennan Wingerter
Scott & Katherine McLeod
Maria E. Hunter
William P. Glascock
Matthew R. Johnson
Kirsten Jacobson
Erika L. Hughes
Moradian
Michael Hromadka & Christina
Kendell M. Garrett
Casey Duhart
James S. Cook
Brian Bush
John T. Baxter
$3,831.80

CLASS OF 2015

Todd & Kimberly Skelton
George & Jordan Shields
Ronald & Karissa Range
Melissa & Juston Owens
Courtney N. Orr
Lindsey E. Lyle
Andrew J. LaPorte
John L. Jolley
Abby K. Hagan
AnCharlene D. Davis
Michael F. Crum
Jarrod D. Blue
$5,136.95

CLASS OF 2017

David Wood
Seth A. Wilson
Laura Vaught
Clinton S. Sprinkle
Thomas J. Smith
$9,680.01

IN MEMORIAM

CLASS OF 2013

Brennan Wingerter
Scott & Katherine McLeod
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AnCharlene D. Davis
Michael F. Crum
Jarrod D. Blue
$5,136.95

IN MEMORIAM
The College of Law thanks all our donors who have made lifetime commitments of $25,000 or more.

You are championing academic excellence in the Volunteer State.

The evening concluded at the Knoxville Convention Center where classes, separated by year of graduation, enjoyed dinner, drinks, and a word with College of Law Dean Melanie Wilson.

Saturday’s activities included a tailgate barbecue followed by Tennessee Vol football facing off against the Charlotte 49ers. And we won – GO VOLS!


For more information, visit the College of Law’s website at law.utk.edu.

To mark their reunion milestone, many alumni were inspired to give and encouraged their classmates to do the same. A total of $139,795 was raised from 130 donors.

Planning for Reunion 2019 on Nov. 1-2 is underway for the classes of 1969, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, and 2009. If you’re a part of one of these classes, mark your calendars and make plans to attend. To learn more, contact Ellen Cole at Ecole@utk.edu.
At the College of Law’s 19th Annual Julian Bluckshear Gala, Tennessee Department of Human Services Commissioner and alumna Danielle Whitworth Barnes encouraged attendees to embrace servant leadership. Named for one of the college’s first African American graduates, the Julian Bluckshear Gala serves as a fundraiser for diversity education.

“As a servant leader, I had to figure out my main goal was not to serve myself or my agency, but to serve others,” Barnes said. As a member of the Governor’s Cabinet, Barnes served former Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam and was reappointed to serve Gov. Bill Lee. The Tennessee Department of Human Services annually provides services to more than two million Tennesseans through a variety of programs, and Barnes oversees a $2.6 billion budget and nearly 5,000 employees.

She said her experiences helped her learn the importance of building a community of trust and brought her to the place she said she knows she’s meant to be. “I haven’t applied for a job in 18 years because I’ve been doing the job I’ve been called to do,” she said. “As you think about the practice of law, think about that one, the dozens, the millions of people you can help along the way. And help them.”

Also as part of the gala activities, students Shannador McLain, Daniel Zydel and Chidimma Nwaneri were recognized for their commitment to leadership and diversity at the College of Law.

College of Law Dean Melanie Wilson recognized adjunct professor and attorney Brooklyn Sawyers Belk with the RBJ Campbelle Award because of her “courageous, selfless, and ongoing commitment to fairness and equality for all people.” Belk encouraged the crowd to be persistent and act with intentionality. “I am no superwoman. Like everyone in this room, I fall down and I have had the grace and the mercy to get back up,” she said. “People once the skeletons of life will tell you there are things you can’t do. Some will mean well, others won’t. Whatever the reason – do not hold on to that.”
SAVE THE DATE

UT Law
Reunion Weekend

'69 '74
'79 '84
'89 '94 '99
'04 '09 '14

NOVEMBER 1 - 2, 2019