

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL MAGAZINE SUMMER 2019

A Transformational Journey

GW LAW STUDENT CLINICIANS SOLVE A LIFE-CHANGING MYSTERY 50 YEARS IN THE MAKING



A FOND FAREWELL TO DEAN MORANT



a magazine for alumni and friends

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A FOND FAREWELL







law briefs

Faculty Approves Major Curricular Reform



THE GW LAW FACULTY HAS approved the most significant reform of the first-year curriculum in more than a generation. Changes will enhance the law school's Legal Research and Writing (LRW) Program and introduce a new course on Legislation and Regulation, which capitalizes on GW's location in the nation's capital.

These curricular innovations, slated for implementation this fall, augment the law school's already strong program and position students for success both nationally and globally.

At the center of the reform is the LRW program, which will be transformed from an adjunct-based model to one taught by

full-time professors and will expand the number of credit hours from four to six. The additional credits will include a more intensive writing experience during the spring semester.

"As one who has taught legal analysis in many forms, I wholeheartedly pursued and promoted these innovations," says Dean Blake D. Morant. "Not only will it improve the instruction of vital skills that our students require, but it also signals to employers and the academy GW Law's commitment to ensuring the competency of our students as both writers and researchers."

Likewise, the new course on legislation and regulation will introduce the fundamentals of administrative law and regulatory interpretation, giving students significant grounding in doctrine key to governmental agencies and legal practice in the Washington, D.C., area. "No other law school in the area offers this innovation, and it remains rather rare in the legal academy at large," says Dean Morant.

The new curriculum will place increased emphasis on fact development, simulated client interactions, professional identity formation, and self-directed learning. "These changes, which position GW Law as a curricular leader, will augment our already strong program, add a professional development component, and better prepare our students for the modern practice of law," Dean Morant says.

HEADING TO THE HAGUE



GW LAW'S STRONG TIES WITH THE International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague deepened this spring when Nayomi Goonesekere, LLM '19, won a coveted spot in the 2019-2020 Judicial Fellows Programme. This marks the second consecutive year that a GW Law LLM

student received a judicial fellowship at the ICJ, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

GW Law is among a select group of law schools invited to nominate candidates for the prestigious fellowship, where participants work alongside some of the world's foremost international jurists. "This is the most competitive fellowship in international law, and it is truly an honor for GW Law that our students have been selected two years in a row," says Rosa Celorio, Associate Dean for International and Comparative Legal Studies. "It speaks to the quality of our students, who successfully compete with the best in the world in international law."

A native of Sri Lanka, Ms. Goonesekere attended GW Law on the Thomas Buergenthal Scholarship, a merit-based award for outstanding international LLM students committed to justice and the rule of law. Professor Emeritus Buergenthal,

who served as the American judge on the ICJ from 2000 to 2010, endowed the scholarship.

Ms. Goonesekere says that her GW Law experiences both inside and outside the classroom positioned her to land the ICJ fellowship. "During my time at GW, I explored a wide variety of courses in public international law and learned from some of the leading practitioners in the field," she says. "I also gained practical experience by externing at the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency of the World Bank Group."

"Working at the Peace Palace is an honor and the most valuable experience one can gain in the field," she continues. "The ICJ Fellowship will enhance my knowledge of the intricacies involved in the settlement of disputes between states and provide me with a stepping stone to pursue a career in public international law."

SIRIUS XM PRESIDENT SCOTT GREENSTEIN KEYNOTES DIPLOMA CEREMONY

NEARLY 650 NEWLY MINTED graduates joined the ranks of GW Law alumni on May 19 at the 152nd Diploma Ceremony of the George Washington University Law School. Celebratory events took place throughout the weekend, ranging from the Dean's Reception at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History to the University Commencement on the National Mall headlined by keynote speaker Savannah Guthrie, co-anchor of NBC News' TODAY.

The Law School Diploma Ceremony, held in the Charles E. Smith Center, featured keynote speaker Scott Greenstein, JD '84, president and chief content officer of Sirius XM Radio. "GW Law is one of the most prestigious in the country, and as its graduates, you join foreign heads of state, U.S. senators, CIA directors, state governors, FBI directors, federal judges, corporate CEOs, and others in a long storied history of notable alumni who have made a difference," he said.

Urging graduates to contribute "to the greater good of society" and to "let the world see you in your fullness," he stated, "You have a blank canvas to paint on, to convey a message, to teach, to entertain, and to inspire. Today, it's time to paint that portrait. You're out of the classrooms and ready to go into the real world. So be passionate and be committed, without fear. I urge you to focus on the possibilities that are ahead of you. Ignore the limitations. We are all excited to see what painting you will create, and how you will lead."

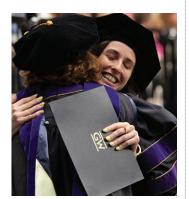
Officiating at his final Commencement, Dean Blake D. Morant charged the graduates to "do well and do good."

"You are indeed the leaders the world needs and we are counting on you to become not only outstanding practitioners but also excellent citizen lawyers who understand the importance of ethics, professionalism, and civility," he said. "You are our living legacy. I thank you and applaud you, not only for what you've achieved, but also for what you are yet to accomplish."















Professional Development Program Wins Coveted National Award



Tazia Statucki, JD '19, SBA Chief of Staff; Susan Fine, Associate Dean for Professional Development and Career Strategy Co-Director, Inns of Court and Foundations of Practice Programs; Jayne Reardon, Chair of the ABA Standing Committee on Professionalism; and Alicia Kingston, JD '19, SBA President

HOPING TO GET ACQUAINTED with the city before the start of classes, first-year GW Law student Nick Kinslow spent last summer visiting monuments, picking his favorite neighborhood restaurants, and discovering how to get around. Originally from Florida, Mr. Kinslow says it only took a few trips on Metro to learn the route from his apartment in Shaw to the George Washington University campus.

"It only took two rides," he says. "It was very simple."

What has not been so simple, he says, is grasping the legal concepts and terminology—which look like plain English but often have precise and distinct legal definitions—in his five law courses.

"A friend and I spent 15 or 20 minutes trying to figure out what this judge from the 1800s was trying to say, then the professor broke it down in like a minute," he says.

To help him get a grip on the study of his "new language," Mr. Kinslow participates in the Inns of Court and Foundations of Practice programs, a fully integrated professional development program for first-year students at GW Law.

First-year students are assigned to one of six Inns of Court, named after former Supreme Court justices, and take their first-year courses with the members of their Inn. Starting the first week of classes, students are offered support and guidance from a diverse team of advisers consisting of faculty, administrators, staff, and upperclass students.

The Inns of Court program is the centerpiece of Foundations of Practice, a voluntary program that helps first-year law students identify their professional goals and build critical professional skills sought by legal employers and clients.

In August, the American Bar Association (ABA) Standing Committee on Professionalism awarded the GW Law Inns of Court and Foundations of Practice programs the 2018 E. Smythe Gambrell Professionalism Award. The Gambrell Award recognizes exemplary and innovative programs in law schools, bar associations, and other legal organizations that help maintain dedication to the legal profession and the public.

The program encourages students to take advantage of important resources to supplement their classroom education, including Inns of Court sessions, Writing Center workshops, and one-on-one writing advice, Career Center workshops and individual counseling, health and wellness programs, cultural competency programs, and advice from practicing lawyers.

Students who complete the program earn the Dean's Recognition for Professional Development, a distinction acknowledged by many legal employers.

Mr. Kinslow, who was initially nervous about being "up the creek without a paddle," says the programs are helping him with school as well as preparing him for his future career, which he hopes will merge his interests in law and entrepreneurship.

GW Law Professor Todd D. Peterson, co-director of the two programs, said the programs help students become more self-directed in their learning and build the foundational competencies required for success in the legal profession through the development of non-cognitive, professional skills not taught in doctrinal law school courses.

"I think one of the reasons the ABA

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FOCUSED ON THE END GOAL. 39

– Michelle Graessle



has an award for professional development programs is that practicing lawyers know how important it is to help students acquire all of the skills they will need for the actual practice of law," Professor Peterson says.

He co-directs the programs with Susan Fine, GW Law's associate dean for professional development and career strategy, and is also an adviser for the Benjamin Cardozo Inn.

While other law schools have professional development programs, what makes GW Law's programs unique, he says, are the advisory teams and the programs' own advisory council made up of legal professionals who train attorneys in government, law firms, and non-profit organizations. Council members help students make real-world connections.

Michelle Graessle, a second-year law student and Inn adviser, says she participated in the programs last year to get comfortable with the transition to law school and gained a better sense of how to shape her interests in international human rights and criminal justice reform into a career.

Ms. Graessle is a member of several law school organizations including the Student Bar Association and the *International Law Review* and works as a legal intern for a nonprofit that helps exonerate wrongfully convicted people in the D.C. area.

"The Inns of Court program helped me focus my efforts to identify practice areas I might want to explore, provided me with excellent networking opportunities, and—maybe most importantly—kept me focused on the end goal, which can be easy to lose sight of with the stress of class and exams," she says.

– By Tatyana Hopkins

A DIRECT PATH TO WALL STREET

GW LAW IN NEW YORK, AN intensive spring semester business law program in the world's top financial center, recently celebrated its third anniversary. The innovative program for aspiring Wall Street attorneys brings 15 GW Law students to the Big Apple each spring for a semesterlong immersion into New York's booming business and financial law sector.

Through a combination of externships, classes, networking opportunities, and one-on-one mentorship with prominent alumni, students gain firsthand exposure to the practice and professional demands of business law. Professor Lawrence Cunningham, director of GW in NY, describes the program as "high impact, high reward."

To date, 40 second- and third-year GW Law students have completed the program since its 2017 inception. The cornerstone of the experience is a rigorous externship at top courts, government offices, and non-profit organizations across the city. Externships are vetted carefully through GW Law's Field Placement Program to ensure a substantive learning experience. Placements have included the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, U.S. Court of International Trade, Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (SIFMA), New York State Attorney General's Office, Manhattan District Attorney, and the U.S. Bankruptcy Court.

In addition, students take business law classes taught by prominent GW Law alumni at the New York firms where they practice. "Students might find themselves attending class on the 35th floor of a building overlooking New York Harbor, mingling with successful attorneys, and getting a feel for corporate culture," Professor Cunningham says. That daily exposure to the corporate workplace, along with outings at which students interact with successful practitioners, help students begin to form their professional identities. "They learn not just about subject matter but about the important professional intangibles like



how to give a quick overview of their skills and how to dress and behave in a corporate environment. This kind of socializing can translate quickly into a job prospect."

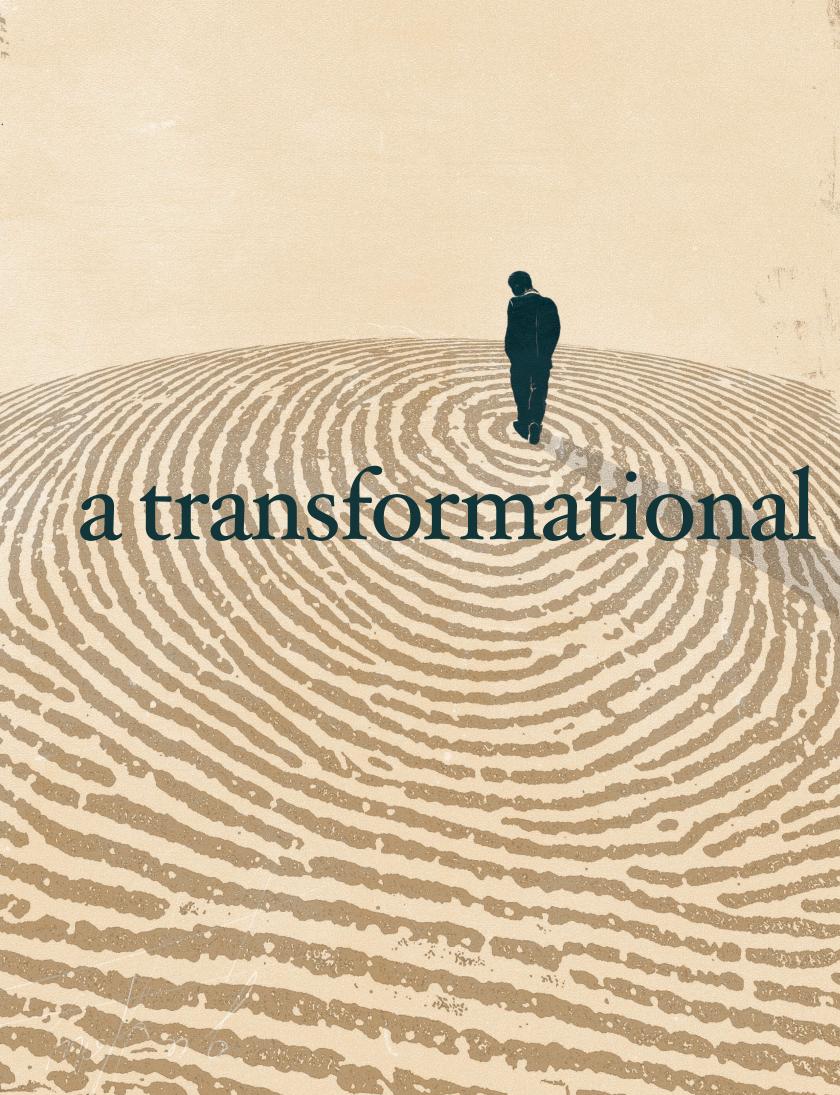
To assist students in their professional development, the program matches each participant with a personal mentor chosen from a pool of accomplished business lawyers. "The New York alums have been looking for a meaningful way to interact with students," Professor Cunningham says, "and this program gives them that opportunity." Mentors and students meet a minimum of three times during the

THEMSELVES ATTENDING CLASS ON THE 35TH FLOOR OF A BUILDING OVERLOOKING NEW YORK HARBOR, MINGLING WITH SUCCESSFUL ATTORNEYS, AND GETTING A FEEL FOR CORPORATE CULTURE. 39

- Professor Cunningham

semester, with mentors offering insights into New York practice, tips on professionalism, and advice on career trajectory.

The results have been tangible. Thanks to the program, GWNY alumni have secured permanent positions at prominent law firms and DA offices throughout New York, while others have landed coveted federal judicial clerkships. "Every student makes significant professional strides that I get to observe up close," Professor Cunningham says. "They develop a sense of self as professionals, and their growth is immeasurable."



it's not easy

to bring an entire courtroom to tears. But there was not a dry eye in the house this spring when GW Law Clinics client Aaron Phillips and his team of student attorneys appeared before a DC Superior Court judge to petition for an order to amend Mr. Phillips' birth certificate to reflect his true name. The hearing, while routine on the surface, marked the life-changing conclusion of a mystery 50 years in the making.



THE POWERFUL STORY BEGAN IN SEPTEMBER 2017, when Bread for the City attorney Danielle Moise, JD '15, who collaborates with the Clinics, referred Mr. Phillips to GW Law's Public Justice Advocacy Clinic (PJAC) for help obtaining a District of Columbia identification card. The lifelong Washingtonian and longtime employee of Flagship Carwash had lost his ID and needed a new one to apply for a DC public housing apartment. But District law demands that ID applicants present their birth certificates, and Mr. Phillips' birth certificate was nowhere to be found. Born in the early '60s and fostered as a child, he was alone in the world—unaware of the names of his birth parents or any potential siblings.

the hunt begins

GW Law Clinic students Noelle Cozbar (now Bryce) and Soohyun Choi, who were beginning their final year of law school, were assigned to the case as part of their fall clinical course with the Public Justice Advocacy Clinic. Directed by Professor Jeffrey S. Gutman, the clinic represents low-income individuals in a wide range of civil litigation cases, including identification cases.

"Noelle and I set off on a semester-long hunt to find Mr. Phillips' birth certificate and uncover the facts of his birth," Ms. Choi says. "The questions of who his birth parents were and why they gave him up seemed to have haunted Mr. Phillips for his whole life and it tugged at my heart."

The determined duo requested information from the Vital Record Divisions of D.C, Maryland, and Virginia; the DC Child and Family Services Agency; the Social Security Administration; and the U.S. Census Bureau. They called surviving relatives of Mr. Phillips' childhood caregivers. They called DC hospitals in search of their client's birth records, and churches in search of his baptismal certificate. "We spent a lot of our time making information requests, researching agency procedures, discussing strategy,

"The questions of who his birth parents were and why they gave him up seemed to have haunted Mr. Phillips for his whole life."



dealing with bureaucratic red tape, carefully documenting all our efforts, and wondering why there was no record of Mr. Phillips anywhere," Ms. Choi recalls.

"Toward the end of the semester, with all of our searches futile so far, I was making peace with the fact that we might not learn anything about Mr. Phillips' birth. But we had one outstanding search request that hadn't come in yet – our Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Social Security Administration – and we hadn't heard anything for weeks."

As the semester was winding down, an envelope arrived at the clinic office from the Social Security Administration. "We opened it and found a photocopy of Mr. Phillips' original Social Security application containing the name of his birth parents," Ms. Bryce says. "With enthusiasm and wonder, Soo and I held this new piece of information and pondered what it would mean for Mr. Phillips' future. But since it was our last day working at the clinic, we had to pass the case to the incoming student clinicians."

passing the torch

PJAC spring student attorneys David Coard and Caroline Merlin, who were both beginning their last semester of law school, took the baton and ran with it. Immediately captivated by Mr. Phillips' warmth, friendliness, and keen sense of optimism, Ms. Merlin said she noticed early on how quick their client was to open up to them and trust them with the case. "He is a remarkably kind and generous person who brings tremendous warmth and laughter into every conversation," she says. "He has faced a lot in his life, and I wouldn't have been surprised if he had become hardened and cynical as a result of that, but he is exactly the opposite."

Aaron Phillips (second from right) flanked by Professor Jeffrey S. Gutman, Noelle Bryce, David Coard, and Caroline Merlin



Walking out of the clinic building after their first meeting in early January, Mr. Coard and Ms. Merlin turned to one another and said, 'It would be amazing if we actually found a living relative," Mr. Coard recalls. "It was a pretty audacious moment given the information we had at the time, but I think it really spurred us on all semester."

Armed with the names of their client's birth parents, who had passed away nearly 40 years ago, the team reached out to the foster care agency in search of relevant files but walked away empty handed. They contacted the Marriage Bureau in search of Mr. Phillips' parents' marriage certificate, but again were disappointed. "We were grasping at straws for weeks, and when we finally found what we were looking for it was, ironically, exactly where it was supposed to be, at the DC Bureau of Vital Records," says Mr. Coard. The Bureau, he explains, had discovered an unnamed birth certificate containing the names of their client's birth parents. "We knew we had hit pay dirt." After months of dogged persistence, they had unearthed Mr. Phillips' original birth certificate.

family ties

The birth certificate revealed new information about Mr. Phillips' father, including his middle initial, occupation, and age at the time of his son's birth. Plugging in the additional details, Ms. Merlin once again searched online records and a Virginia marriage certificate popped up, listing Mr. Phillips' parents as the parents of the bride. "My heart skipped a beat because it hit me that the bride could be our client's sister," Ms. Merlin recounts. "I looked up the bride, Mrs. Denny, who was born in DC six years before Mr. Phillips, and everything I found further confirmed my belief that she was his sister."

The case reached its storybook ending when Mr. Phillips asked Ms. Merlin to reach out to Mrs. Denny, who now lives in Pennsylvania, to find out if, in fact, they were siblings. "That phone call was one of the most nerve-wracking moments of the entire case for me," reflects Ms. Merlin. "Mrs. Denny quietly asked my client's name and year of birth. When I replied, she screamed, 'Oh my God, you found him, you found my brother,' and dropped the phone. I will never forget that moment for the rest of my life. Mr. Phillips has a family and we had located them."

Mrs. Denny, it turns out, had visited her newborn brother in a DC orphanage shortly after his birth and had never given up hope of seeing him again. "For over 50 years, she had searched for him and counted him among her siblings," says Ms. Merlin. Remarkably, Mrs. Denny's first grandson was named Aaron in honor of her long-lost brother, and Aaron was listed among the surviving siblings in his brother's funeral service pamphlet several years ago.

"It was really emotional, hearing how hard she worked to keep the memory of Mr. Phillips alive within her family because for so long he had essentially been alone in the world," Ms. Merlin says. "And to know that someone was out there thinking of him and caring for him all along was incredibly moving."



Noelle Bryce, Caroline Merlin, Soohyun Choi, David Coard

Mr. Phillips, in fact, had seven surviving brothers and sisters and numerous nieces and nephews, many of whom live in the Washington metropolitan area. Mrs. Denny quickly made the journey from Pennsylvania to DC for an emotional reunion with her long-lost brother.

"The week after Caroline and I introduced Mr. Phillips to his family, he called me one morning and told me about a big Sunday dinner he had gone to with his newly discovered sister and niece," Mr. Coard recalls. "He was rattling off the names of sisters, cousins, nieces, nephews, great nieces, and great nephews with fervent joy. You could tell his first meeting with them had gone exactly how he had hoped. It was like they were waiting for him this whole time to walk into their lives. It was a surreal moment for me because I knew that we had contributed to a really important moment in this man's life."

more than just a legal victory

Soon after the emotional family reunion, everyone gathered in a DC Superior Court courtroom, where Mr. Coard successfully petitioned the judge to order a correction to Mr. Phillips' birth certificate. "The day we went to court was almost picture perfect," Mr. Coard recalls. "Mr. Phillips filed into the courtroom with an entourage, trailed by his sister, her husband, two of her daughters, three student attorneys, and Professor Gutman."

Scanning the scene, Mr. Coard says he marveled at the onceimprobable reality of his client appearing before the judge with his newfound family. "I thought to myself, 'This is what representation is. This is the power of having an advocate.' It can change your whole life. I often reflect on that hearing because it gave me valuable insight into the honorability of our profession."

For Ms. Choi, the experience was equally powerful." The case reminded me why I came to law school in the first place: to be an advocate for people in need of legal assistance, to make a difference in someone's life," she says. "Clinic was a truly special experience because I was able to help clients like Mr. Phillips, with real stakes. I spent every moment in clinic driven, with a sense of purpose, and now I feel confident and prepared to start practicing law."

Ms. Bryce calls herself "changed for the better" having met Mr. Phillips and shared in his life story. "I grew a lot as a human being and became much more conscious of people's daily struggles for acceptance, identity, and family," she reflects. "Our efforts gave Mr. Phillips clarity and closure about his childhood and reunited him with his family. Stories like Mr. Phillips' exemplify the crucial need for public interest advocacy and compassionate legal service."

The successful conclusion of the case represented not only a legal victory, but an even bigger personal one for Mr. Phillips, says Ms. Merlin. "It was very affirming to have our legal careers start out with such a resounding victory for our client, and it is something I'm going to always draw on when I need motivation to keep fighting," she says. "Every phone call, every email, every morning spent waiting in line at an agency office trying to get a document or get a letter signed, was absolutely worth it. Working on Mr. Phillips' case has truly been one of the most incredible experiences of my life, both personally and professionally, and I will never forget it."

Mr. Phillips, who is now on a waiting list for a DC public housing apartment, says he always had a feeling his family was out there. "The wonderful students at GW really worked hard to help me, and they changed my life. I have a large family now, and I feel happy and fulfilled. I am truly blessed."



Fond Farewell to Dean Morant

After five years at the helm of the George Washington University Law School, Dean Blake D. Morant stepped down this month to join the faculty after a sabbatical leave.

Moments after the news was announced in February, hundreds of messages began pouring in from well wishers near and far.

The outpouring of affection from constituents and colleagues worldwide underscores the popularity of the affable dean, who emphasized community and spearheaded myriad innovations during his tenure.





66 It has been a privilege to serve as Dean of the George Washington University Law School. I look forward to continuing to be a member of this wonderful community."

GW LAW'S FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN DEAN,

Dean Morant's engaging leadership style and eagerness to personally connect with the law school's many constituencies quickly galvanized the community. From India to Brazil, Hawaii to the United Kingdom, he traversed the globe, forging ties with GW Law alumni worldwide and leaving an indelible mark on all.

Dean Morant simultaneously focused his attention on ensuring the law school's upward trajectory. He ushered in a number of programmatic and curricular advancements, including the most significant reform of the first-year curriculum in a generation (see page 2), the launch of the pathbreaking GW in New York program (see page 5), and the expansion of the nationally recognized Inns of Court and Foundations of Practice, a fully integrated professional development program for first-year students (see page 4).

A tireless advocate for students, he introduced a "Lunch with the Dean" series to engage with small groups of students on a regular basis. "Our students are some of the brightest and most humanitarian I've ever known and communing with them is always a highlight," he says. "Their dedicated commitment to social responsibility and collegiality has created a unique and engaging intellectual community at GW Law."

He also provided students with opportunities to network with accomplished alumni through his "Conversation with the Dean" series. "GW Law is privileged to have many stellar alumni whose professional accomplishments are paired with a sense of commitment to both the profession and their alma mater," he says. "We were delighted to bring a number of them to campus over the past few years to discuss their careers and engage with our students."

Long recognized as one of the most influential people in the legal academy, Dean Morant concurrently shared his passion for legal education on the national stage. He was the 2015 president of the Association of American Law Schools and is a current member of the ABA Commission on the Future of Legal Education. A leading voice in the national conversation on legal education, he speaks nationally and internationally on pressing issues in the field, writes regularly for popular publications such as *Forbes* and *The Atlantic*, and is a frequent guest on the Joe Madison show on XM Sirius radio.

"During my upcoming sabbatical year, I look forward to devoting more time to my national and international work highlighting the importance of lawyers in a complex democracy and the ever-present importance of professionalism and civility," he says. "It has been a privilege to serve as Dean of the George Washington University Law School. I look forward to continuing to be a member of this wonderful community."

Q&A with BDM

- Q: What is the most interesting gift you received during your time at GW Law?
- A: Music has been one of my lifelong passions. I served as solo clarinetist in the wind ensemble and orchestra in college and now sing in churches. In my first year as dean, an alumnus' wife, having discovered my musical interest, gifted me with a clarinet in the hope that I would play again. I should soon have more time for such pursuits.
- Q: What is the most enjoyable trip you took as Dean?
- A: Every trip in which I encountered GW Law alumni has been gratifying, to say the least. Perhaps the most memorable have been visits to Hawaii where the law school has a fairly sizeable contingent of alumni. In Hawaii, I was given a special lei by our alumni, symbolizing the culture of the island. I kept it as a memento. Trips to India and Brazil also stand out, in large measure due to the size and enthusiasm of the alumni community in those countries.
- Q: What is the most interesting venue you visited as part of your decanal duties?
- A: The Denver Broncos headquarters and training facilities in Denver, Colorado, ranks high on the list. GW alumnus Rich Slivka, who serves as general counsel and chief operating officer for the franchise, took us on a behind-the-scenes tour and has since been a committed supporter of the law school.
- Q: What will you miss the most about being dean of GW Law?
- A: What I'll miss the most is the engagement with the worldwide network of outstanding alumni who have excelled in almost every aspect of the professional world and have an enviable and enduring bond with the law school.
- Q: What do you hope is your lasting legacy at GW Law?
- A: Fostering with all constituents of GW Law a strong sense of community that distinguishes the law school and impresses upon our students the essentiality of humanism and civility as qualities of a successful professional.



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