

Morgan Lewis Foundation Diversity Scholarships Awarded To Three Deserving GW Law Students

PAYING IT

When Grace E. Speights, JD '82, was a student, her GW Law scholarship made all the difference. "There's no way I could have gone to law school without it," she says. "I know what it means to be financially strapped." Ms. Speights and her law firm, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, want to give that same advantage to others who have overcome great odds to get to law school. Started two years ago with funds from a pro bono case the firm won, the Morgan Lewis Foundation Diversity Scholarship awards \$20,000 for two years to deserving law students.

"We focus on ethnically diverse students who have completed their first year of law school," says Ms. Speights, who is a co-managing partner at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. "We look at academic achievement, financial need, work and life experience, and leadership."



FORWARD

By Laura Hambleton



GW Law students (left to right) Vincent Glynn, Claudia Ojeda, and Eman Lamu—the recipients of this year’s Morgan Lewis Foundation Diversity Scholarship—with Grace Speights, JD ’82, co-managing partner of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius

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This year, the firm awarded scholarships to three GW Law students, in addition to students at Boston College, the University of Virginia, University of Pennsylvania, and University of California.

"I think the scholarship is very meaningful given the cost of a law school education," Ms. Speights says. "It can help students meet their needs, cut down on the amount of their loans. We know how burdensome loans can be. They can limit your options after law school."

Vincent Glynn

GW LAW SECOND-YEAR STUDENT VINCENT GLYNN has no shortage of dreams for when he graduates—clerking for a federal judge, working as a federal prosecutor, becoming a judge, and maybe running for public office. "I want to get my hands on a lot post-law school," he says.

The Morgan Lewis scholarship came at a perfect time, giving Mr. Glynn a financial boost and some flexibility as he explores his options in law school. This fall, he is taking a class in evidence and the second year of constitutional law. He also is a writing fellow and interns with Judge Reggie Barnett Walton, a senior federal judge of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

This summer his interests took him far afield. He clerked for Sheila Adams, a circuit administrative judge for the 7th Judicial Circuit in Maryland before attending GW's Oxford summer

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program in international human rights law at New College, Oxford, in the United Kingdom.

"I saw more of the local issues states deal with, and how the law impacts families," Mr. Glynn says about his time with Judge Adams. "Oxford was amazing because of the diversity of perspectives. It was almost overwhelming."

A decade ago, Mr. Glynn was following a different trajectory during a time he calls his troubled youth. "I had a lot of misplaced anger," he says of his years growing up in Bowie, Md. "I wasn't on a path to law school. I had such a bad temper."

His anger led to trouble in school, but his mother didn't give up on him. "She is my biggest supporter, even about things I don't get excited over," he says. "Same with the rest of my family—my aunts, uncles, and grandparents. They are especially proud of where I came from—that little boy who would get in trouble and had anger issues."

When he eventually overcame his temper, he started to excel in high school. He joined the mock trial team, where he became interested in legal proceedings. At Towson University, he found his calling.

"For the first time, I felt like I was a minority," he says. "My high school was predominately African American. I went to a college that is predominately white. There, I started learning about racial discrepancy in the criminal justice system. Until we diversify judges and lawyers, we can't effect change."

A desire to improve the legal system drew him to GW Law. "I am definitely interested in taking my skills and using them for change," he says. "I mentioned this in my interviews for internships with judges. Prosecutors hold a lot of power in charging. There are a disproportionate number of arrests, but the laws that are enacted in the first place are why I am interested in politics as well—to effect change."

Claudia Ojeda

AS A YOUNG CHILD, CLAUDIA OJEDA, JD '18, ESCAPED A country where one person controlled politics and the law: Fidel Castro. She and her mother made three attempts to leave Cuba by boat. They finally succeeded in 2001, when Ms. Ojeda was 7. Her father followed, but overland on a much more treacherous route across parts of Latin America.

Her family's desire and drive for a better life has inspired Ms. Ojeda ever since.

She attended the University of Florida on a full academic scholarship after graduating from Southwest Senior High School in Kendall, Fla., near Miami. At first, she aspired to be a doctor, following in her mother's footsteps. Her mother is a nurse practitioner and had been a doctor in Cuba.

"My first bio class was at 8:30 in the morning," she says. "I walked out. This was not for me."

She tried different subjects and joined the mock trial team. There, she thrived. She was chosen to go to the state competition, did well, and was sent to nationals in Washington, D.C., where, again, she won her trials.

Law school was a natural extension. She applied to a program for minority students interested in legal careers the summer after her junior year in college. She moved to Chicago and worked for the firm DLA Piper. That clinched it.

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“By the end of the summer, I knew I would attend law school,” she says. “I liked the skill set I saw in the attorneys I shadowed that summer.”

Prior to commencing her legal studies at GW, she worked as a summer associate at Shearman & Sterling through the Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO) program. The experience influenced how she approached her classes in her first year of law school.

Her favorites were legal writing and research — skills she used this past summer at a top law firm in Miami, Bilzin Sumberg.

When Ms. Ojeda saw the posting for the Morgan Lewis Foundation Diversity Scholarship on the law school’s digital home page, “it was calling out to me,” she says. “I am a minority. I have done well in law school.”

She applied in the middle of preparing for a mock trial, sending in her application an hour before the deadline. A month later, she was invited for an interview with Grace Speights.

“She told me why the scholarship got started,” Ms. Ojeda says. “It was an incredible story that resonated with my own.”

Eman Lemu

THE STORY OF 2L EMAN LEMU CONTAINS MANY OF the same elements: a strong sense of purpose and perseverance. Both she and Ms. Ojeda left their home countries at the age of 7.

At that time, Ms. Lemu and her family moved from Ethiopia to Kenya. Four years later, she was in Tampa, Fla., a middle school student taking English as a second language.

“The ESL teacher only spoke Spanish and English,” Ms. Lemu says. “No one spoke Amharic. Most of the other students in the class spoke Spanish, too. There was one kid from Russia. The good thing was that it forced me to learn English quickly to communicate.”

The more she learned the language and the more she read, the better she understood and could write in English. By her sophomore year in high school, she did well on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and started really believing in what she could do academically.

She earned a full scholarship to Florida State University, where she studied finance. She also held down two jobs, one at a bank and the other as a leasing agent in an apartment building.

Her goal was to be an entrepreneur, but a summer course in prelaw with the Chicago-Kent College of Law changed her mind.

“I took different law courses,” she says. “I went to different law firms and to the courts. They showed us what it is to be a lawyer. Attorneys are problem solvers and that really intrigued me.”

After college, Ms. Lemu worked for a year to earn money. Then she entered GW. She treats her studies as she would a job. “I am up at 5 in the morning,” she says. “I take this very seriously. It’s an investment. It’s a lot of money. The first year was challenging, but I’ve always worked. Law school is an extension of work.”

She is thankful for the Morgan Lewis Foundation Diversity Scholarship. Because of it, she can borrow less money to finish her degree.

She hasn’t charted out her exact route after law school. This past summer, she worked for a mid-size firm in Tampa, doing litigation and antitrust law. During the fall semester, she worked for a district judge in Virginia.

She’s perfectly comfortable in the many facets of the legal arena, and does not hesitate in her abilities with her adopted language. “There are days I have to look up a word in the dictionary, but I am very comfortable in English,” she says. “America is my second home. I am grateful to be here.”

All three GW Law scholarship recipients inspire Ms. Speights. As they did, she has overcome a disadvantaged childhood, growing up in a poor neighborhood of Philadelphia, to reach great heights.

In 2015, she was awarded the NAACP’s Champion of Justice Award and the Washington Bar Association Legal Fund’s Maden Haden Trailblazer Award. And she has been named one of Washington, D.C.’s 100 most powerful women, a member of the Who’s Who of Black Lawyers, and one of the best attorneys in America.

“I see my role as somebody students can look to and say ‘if someone like Grace Speights from her background can make it at a major firm, there is hope I can do the same thing.’”

She mentors and sponsors as many diverse law professionals as she can, getting emails and calls every day. She relishes those contacts and believes they are important.

The scholarship is an extension of that belief in the importance of nurturing the next generation of lawyers from underrepresented backgrounds.

It also is a stroke of encouragement and a mark of excellence as students make their way in law school and beyond. “I was pretty impressed with them,” Ms. Speights says. “These students will try to make a significant contribution to the legal profession. It’s exciting.”

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