Experience through service: making a difference at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Elon Law’s Center for Professional Development works with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to help students earn externships and internships in the Department’s Winston-Salem and Washington, D.C. offices. The Office of Regional Counsel in Winston-Salem provides Elon Law students with valuable experience that contributes to the VA’s important mission. Chris Smith, Assistant Dean for Professional Development at the law school, says he appreciates the strong relationship between Elon and the VA.

“The Office of Regional Counsel in Winston-Salem has been a valuable partner in our efforts to expand placement opportunities for students,” Smith said. “We’re glad that our students and graduates are developing legal careers in a federal legal affairs office that is well-known for its professionalism and dedicated staff.”

From 2010 to 2013, eight students have worked with the VA offices. In addition, two alumni are currently working as attorneys with the VA. Based in Winston-Salem, Daniel C. Rattray is Regional Counsel for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs region covering North Carolina and Virginia.

“Everyone in our office looks forward to working with our externs from Elon Law,” Rattray says. “As individuals, and collectively, they have proved to be special folks: bright, mature and engaged – and each one of our externs has, in his or her own way, improved our externship program. We are consistently and delightfully impressed with each student’s authentic desire to make the externship experience for the next student better and more meaningful than their own.”

Monique Smart L’14 reinforces the positive relationship between Elon and the Office of Regional Counsel in Winston-Salem.

“Everyone in the office is so kind and open to teaching you various aspects of the law,” Smart said. “The office handles different areas such as contracts, ethics, employment, torts and collections. The attorneys are more than willing to give you a variety of assignments to work on and are always providing feedback so that you can improve.”

Phillip Clontz L’12 who is now a Risk Management and Compliance Officer at Pendleton Financial in Raleigh, N.C., says his time with the VA office in Winston-Salem provided career advantages.

“It was a great opportunity to expand my breadth of knowledge in health care law and government regulation,” Clontz said. “While most of my prior work experiences had been in the corporate realm of the United States healthcare system, I was able to explicate upon my limited public health experiences in evaluating medical malpractice claims in the VA system. I think this position was a vital stepping stone in elevating me into my current career, and the experience enabled me to acquire skills necessary to be successful in healthcare and government regulation moving forward.”

Nicholas Livengood L’15, who interned in the VA’s Winston-Salem office in 2013, credits his internship for the opportunities it presented to apply leadership skills on a daily basis by interacting with practicing lawyers and handling sensitive client matters.

“My time with VA was extremely beneficial, as it allowed me to handle claims and work with legal issues which I had not seen before,” says Livengood. “The experience taught me the importance of working with clients who are unfamiliar with legal issues in a way that allows both parties to reach an understanding, and ultimately, a successful conclusion.”

Smith says the relationships that are building between Elon and employers like the VA are what excites the law school’s Center for Professional Development team.

“It’s really gratifying to help law students embark on employment experiences that involve strengthening the federal agency servicing American veterans,” Smith says. “The stories of their work not only to advance the mission of the VA, but also to serve veterans directly in many instances, is part of what makes our work at the Center for Professional Development rewarding on a personal level.”

Rattray agrees.

“I regard our relationship with Elon Law’s Center for Professional Development as one of our office’s most highly valued external partnerships,” Rattray says. “Our Elon externs have provided invaluable assistance in our delivery of legal services to our VA clients and the nation’s veterans. We have also been fortunate enough to hire a recent Elon Law grad, whose externship in our office turned out to be an extended job interview. I look forward to continuing and enhancing our relationship as we work together to develop future lawyers and, no doubt, leaders in the legal profession.”
Pro bono and community service at the heart of the student experience

In the 2012–13 academic year, Elon Law students performed more than 15,000 hours of pro bono legal services. Students served through clinics in elder law, immigration law and wills drafting, as well as other service-oriented courses and student-led efforts including the Tax Assistance Program, Wills for Heroes and Innocence Project.

“Through pro bono work we have the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge about our future roles as ‘lawyer-leaders,’ as well as to embrace our potential to serve as ‘community problem solvers’ long before we enter the profession,” said Sherea’ Burnett L’13.

The student-led Pro Bono Board increased awareness among the student body about pro bono opportunities and helped to create additional service projects for students. In October, the board organized Pro Bono Week to demonstrate the impact of pro bono work. The event included Elon Law Ask a Lawyer Day, in which students assisted volunteer attorneys with client counseling for Legal Aid of North Carolina.

In addition to pro bono services, students contribute significantly to the local community through fundraisers, food and clothing drives and volunteer work, supporting local chapters of the American Red Cross, Alzheimer’s research foundations, domestic violence and homeless shelters, Habitat for Humanity, Urban Ministries and other organizations.

In August 2012, the Class of 2015 volunteered with local organizations through the law school’s annual Elon Reaches Out community service day. Organizations served included the spca of the Triad, Greensboro Urban Ministries and the Interactive Resource Center for homeless services. The event promotes the value of community involvement and volunteerism by Elon Law’s future leaders.

Elon Law students take leadership roles in ABA Law Student Division

At the spring 2013 meeting of the ABA Fourth Circuit Law Student Division, hosted by Elon Law, David Lambert L’14 was elected governor of the circuit, representing 17 law schools in North and South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia. Ian Phillips L’15, the incoming vice president of the Student Bar Association, will serve as executive lieutenant governor of the Fourth Circuit division and Brian Park L’14, president of Elon’s tax law interest group, will serve as the lieutenant governor charged with assisting law schools within the Circuit in developing and maintaining Volunteer Income Tax Assistance programs.

Elon Law students teach at high schools in Street Law course

For the fifth consecutive year, Elon Law students taught high school students about law and human rights, encouraging teenagers to examine whether laws and legal systems should be changed to better reflect democratic values.


The course was established by Elon Law Professor Steve Friedland during the 2008-09 academic year and is taught by Larry D. Brown Jr., former assistant district attorney for Alamance County, N.C., and a member of the extended faculty at Elon Law. Elon students have taught the course at several public high schools in Greensboro, including Dudley, Page and Ragsdale high schools and The Academy at Lincoln.

2012 Journal of Leadership and the Law published

The second edition of the online Journal of Leadership and the Law was published on October 17, 2012. It includes interviews with accomplished lawyers about leadership in the judiciary and immigration law, as well as student insights about the 2012 Conference on Law and Leadership and the value of interdisciplinary work, multilingualism and “receptiveness” to effective leadership in the law.

Conceived by Elon Law’s Leadership Fellows, the Journal of Leadership and the Law is law student produced. The publication includes video excerpts from an interview with Judge James L. Gale, special superior court judge for complex business cases, N.C. Business Court. In the interview, Gale comments on the importance of integrity and preparedness as a lawyer, the difficulty and necessity of decision-making in high-stakes court cases and the leadership opportunities available at Elon Law. Pamela Boeka L’13, Caroline Johnson L’14, Andrew Realon L’14 and Patrick Ward L’14 wrote articles, notes and reflections for the publication.
Moot Court teams excel in national competitions

Since first entering interscholastic competitions in 2008, Elon’s Moot Court program has earned national recognition for oral advocacy and a number of best brief awards. Elon students received the following awards and honors in the 2012–13 academic year:


» Chantelle Lytle ’13, Jason Senges ’13 and Adam Spivey ’13, quarterfinalists. William B. Spong Moot Court Tournament, William & Mary School of Law, February 2013.

» Will Drath ’13 and Jennifer Meeks Mickle ’13, best petitioners’ brief. Legal Ethics and Professionalism Moot Court Competition, Mercer University School of Law, November 2012.

» Will Drath ’13 and Jennifer Meeks Mickle ’13, quarterfinalists. Legal Ethics and Professionalism Moot Court Competition, Mercer University School of Law, November 2012.

» Sarah Boshears ’13 and Grant Buckner ’13, best brief. Leroy R. Hassell Sr. National Constitutional Law Moot Court Competition, Regent University School of Law, October 2012. (Boshears and Buckner also placed third with this brief in the 2012–13 Brief-Writing-Award competition of Scribes, The American Society of Legal Writers.)

» Sarah Boshears ’13 and Grant Buckner ’13, quarterfinalists. Leroy R. Hassell Sr. National Constitutional Law Moot Court Competition, Regent University School of Law, October 2012.

» Daniel Harris ’13 and Gwendolyn Lewis ’13, quarterfinalists. Leroy R. Hassell Sr. National Constitutional Law Moot Court Competition, Regent University School of Law, October 2012.

» Daniel Harris ’13 and Gwendolyn Lewis ’13, third place brief. Leroy R. Hassell Sr. National Constitutional Law Moot Court Competition, Regent University School of Law, October 2012.

The Moot Court Board also hosted the third annual Billings, Exum & Frye National Moot Court Competition. The school’s 2012–13 competitive teams were coached by Senior Associate Dean Alan Woodlief, director of moot court programs, and Professors Jim Exum, Scott Gaylord, Bonnie McAlister and Tom Noble.

Leadership Fellows join forces to address global and local challenges

Elon Law’s Leadership Fellows hosted a second annual Leadership Academy in 2013, welcoming Elon University’s undergraduate Isabella Cannon Leadership Fellows to collaborate in the examination of global problems and local solutions.

“The undergraduate Fellows help law students to take a step back and look at leadership in a more holistic sense,” Daniel Watts L’15 said. “This symbiotic dynamic helps law students to ‘disconnect’ from law school for an instant, only to come away with a greater appreciation of the law as the conduit for change in any realm. In turn, the undergraduates are able to see global citizenship in practice, giving the term teeth, instead of broadcasting it as merely an academic mantra.”

Academy participants explored the role of individuals in achieving local and global change and the concept of happiness as a measurement of corporate and government performance. Shoshanna Silverberg L’15 led a discussion about the challenges and impacts of global food production and Emily Seawell L’15 (pictured above standing) led a discussion on sweatshops and outsourcing in foreign countries.

2012 Intramural Moot Court champions

Kaalil Muhammad L’14, left, was named Best Oralist from the Preliminary Rounds at Elon Law’s 2012 intramural moot court competition. Jennifer Bobowski L’14, center, and Patrick Ward L’14, second from left, were the first-runner up team and won the competition’s Best Team Brief award. David Lambert L’14 and Christian Robin L’14, right and second from right, respectively, won the final round of the competition. Robin was named Best Oralist from the Final Round. The final round was judged by the Hon. Robert H. Edmunds Jr., associate justice of the N.C. Supreme Court; the Hon. Ralph A. Walker, retired associate judge of the N.C. Court of Appeals; and the Hon. James L. Gale, special superior court judge for complex business cases, N.C. Business Court.
**Kaitlin Shimansky receives Women of Justice Award**

North Carolina Lawyers Weekly named Kaitlin Shimansky L’13 an inaugural Women of Justice Award honoree in 2012. The awards recognize women in North Carolina who demonstrate leadership, integrity, service, sacrifice and accomplishment in improving the quality of justice and exemplifying the highest ideals of the legal profession. Shimansky received the Leader of Tomorrow Award at the 2012 Women of Justice Awards reception in Raleigh. Shimansky’s work as president of the Elon Law chapter of the Innocence Project and student in the Humanitarian Immigration Law Clinic, as well as her interest in serving as a public defender, were featured in a special section of the publication.

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**Women’s Law Association recognizes Judge Teresa Vincent and Tiffany Atkins L’11**

The Women’s Law Association at Elon Law celebrated students, faculty and legal professionals at the fifth annual Women in the Profession Dinner in April 2013. This year’s Outstanding Woman in the Profession honoree was Judge Teresa H. Vincent, district court judge for the 18th district of North Carolina (pictured above, fifth from right). Elected to the bench in 2000, Vincent served as an assistant district attorney for seven years prior to joining the bench.

“We selected Judge Vincent for her tireless efforts to help put an end to domestic violence,” said Mallory Horne L’14, WLA professionalism chair. “She exemplifies what we can all strive to become—community oriented, successful and caring.”

Tiffany Atkins L’11 received the Outstanding Alumna in the Profession award. Atkins is a staff attorney with Legal Aid of North Carolina, where she works primarily with domestic violence clients and on family law matters.

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**David Gergen, Jim Hunt and advisory board engage law students at special forum**

A September luncheon at Elon Law provided students the opportunity to meet and interact with members of Elon’s Law School Advisory Board. Students heard from Board of Advisors Chairman David Gergen and former N.C. Governor James “Jim” Hunt (pictured above, at right and left respectively).

“I hope that, in addition to being good lawyers, you will also be good leaders in our democracy,” Hunt said. “There is a great history in this country of lawyers providing some of the best leadership in America. We need more of that.”

“The importance of Elon hosting events like this, with the Board of Advisors, is student access to the lawyers and leaders that are invested in Elon Law School,” Ernest Lewis L’15 said. “David Gergen’s speech was a great bonus. To have one of the greatest political minds in America give his time in this way is a real gift. These opportunities are vitally important to our growth as lawyer-leaders.”

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**New Student Bar Association leadership**

Elon Law students elected to SBA leadership positions, from left, Lauren Kemp, Channing Franklin, Ernest Lewis, Stacy Kroustalis, Nicholas Livengood, Emily Pfeiffer, Ian Phillips, Amber Donta, Caitlin Cutchin and Katie Koone, incoming SBA president.