

THE PUBLICATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC MCGEORGE SCHOOL OF LAW

PACIFIC LAW



Fall 2005

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Ready to tackle REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS

Five new graduates follow their hearts to pursue promising careers By Hudson Sangree; Photography Bill Mahon

Giving meaning to the law

After graduating in May, **Anthony Williams** faced a dilemma familiar to many law students: Should he become a public interest lawyer or use his new law degree in a more lucrative way?

Williams' dilemma had some notable twists, however. The 37-year-old is the California State Bar's director of governmental affairs, the bar's chief lobbyist. Until last year, he worked as a top advisor to former state Senate President Pro Tem John Burton. Williams attended classes in the evening division at McGeorge while working for Burton and the bar.

With Williams as his point man, Burton, a powerful San Francisco Democrat, introduced some of the most important criminal-justice measures of recent years. They included controversial laws meant to free wrongfully convicted inmates through DNA testing and to help release battered women who killed their abusers.

Though not about to give up his day job just yet, Williams says he struggles with the question of whether to continue working solely in politics or to be a practicing attorney and handle cases under the laws he helped create. Both the battered women's law and DNA measure lack attorneys to work the cases, he notes.

"Now that I've worked to enact these laws, I'm interested in getting my hands dirty to work on individual cases," says Williams. "It really does mean something to work on legislation, but the legislation only does so much. You get it enacted, and so what if there aren't lawyers to handle the cases? What good does it do to have the legislation on the books?"

Williams is on the board of the Northern California Innocence Project, a program at the Santa Clara University

School of Law that aims to free wrongfully convicted inmates. He also helps raise funds for the California Habeas Project, which aids battered women in prison.

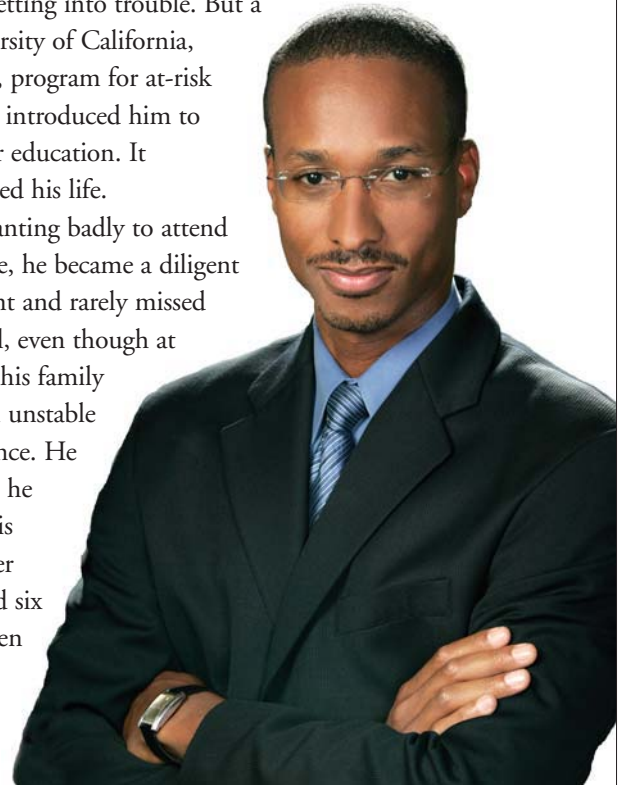
In addition, Williams is working with the Bakersfield City School District to lower the high rates at which black male teens are suspended from school. Though misbehavior must be dealt with, suspensions merely give teens more time for gang activities, Williams argues.

Williams comes to these efforts knowing firsthand the effects of poverty. His family experienced hard times as he grew up in Bakersfield, and his younger brother was shot to death on a city street in a possible gang slaying, he says.

"The people I'd like to help are the people I grew up around," Williams says. "I saw the devastation of drugs and alcohol and poverty. That's what got my brother killed."

Williams says that as a young teen he, too, was unfocused and getting into trouble. But a University of California, Davis, program for at-risk youth introduced him to higher education. It changed his life.

Wanting badly to attend college, he became a diligent student and rarely missed school, even though at times his family led an unstable existence. He recalls he and his mother moved six or seven times



during high school, at one point living in a motel. In another instance a shooting at the next-door neighbor's house interrupted his studying.

Williams eventually attended UC Davis, obtaining a bachelor's degree in political science in 1990. In 1992 he earned a master's degree in public policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

"It's not enough for me to feather my own nest," says Williams. "I ask myself, what am I doing to make lives better?"

Driven to excel

Meghan Gavin is, by any measure, an exceptional student. In May she was named valedictorian of her graduating class at



Pacific McGeorge. As an undergraduate, she earned election to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at the University of California, Davis, and she has won a host of other academic honors in college and law school.

In September, she'll begin a prestigious federal clerkship with U.S. District Judge Garland Burrell, Jr., in Sacramento. She has a post-clerkship job lined up with Downey Brand, Sacramento's largest law firm. All this, and she's only 25 years old.

What's the drive behind such youthful success? "It's a lot of hard work but also having passion and enjoying what you're doing," says Gavin. "That's what drives me to excel."

Gavin, who grew up in Benicia, says she was always drawn to being a lawyer. "People who knew me since I was little thought I was headed in that direction," she says.

A middle-school teacher would have Gavin and her classmates reenact scenes from books as a way to bring alive the novels they were reading. Some of those scenes took place in courtrooms. "I always volunteered to be an attorney because I enjoyed it so much," Gavin recalls.

A political science class in college that examined the judicial process cemented her interest in studying law, she says. She earned her bachelor's degree in political science and communications from UC Davis in 2002.

Gavin says she chose to attend Pacific McGeorge because she wanted to stay in the Sacramento region, and because she liked the campus and the professors she met at a visiting day for prospective students. "The school offered an ideal package of a place to study and a place to live," she says.

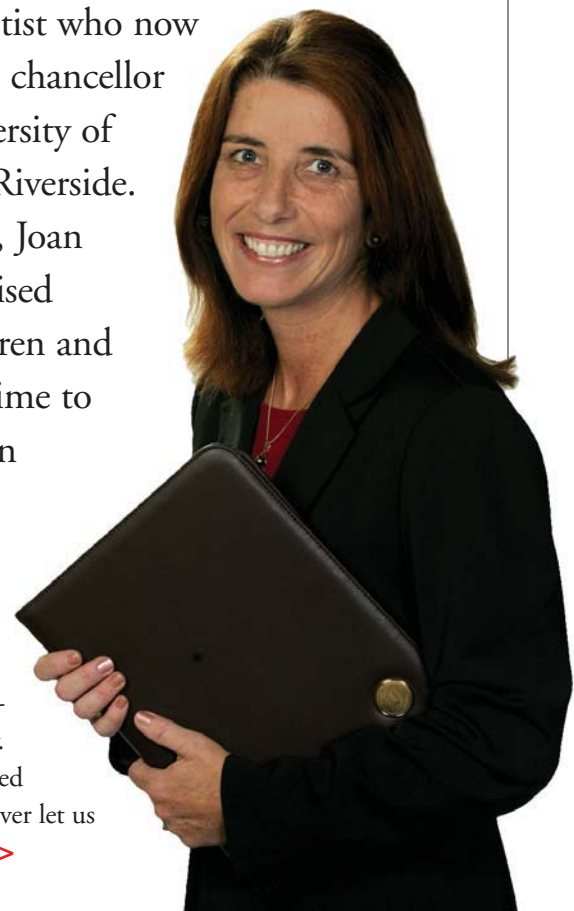
Gavin hopes herself to teach law someday.

"My passion has always been to teach," she says. "I would like to be a law instructor, whether in law school or possibly at the undergraduate level. I may go back and get my LLM. But that's looking down the road quite a ways."

Success runs in her family

Kathleen Cordova Lyon's father, Fred Cordova, attended West Point and built his own highly successful contracting firm. Her oldest sister, France Cordova, is an astrophysicist and former chief NASA scientist who now serves as the chancellor of the University of California, Riverside. Her mother, Joan Cordova, raised twelve children and still found time to start her own company.

So it comes as no surprise when Katy Cordova Lyon attributes her academic success to her family. "My parents valued education and never let us quit," she says. >



Lyon, who graduated from Pacific McGeorge in December 2004, was the valedictorian of her Evening Division class. She passed the February bar and now works as an associate at Murphy Austin Adams Schoenfeld, a Sacramento-based firm that specializes in real estate, construction, health care and employment cases.

At Murphy Austin, Lyon is working in the construction and real estate practice areas, putting her contracting background to use. "Construction litigation uses a lot of technical knowledge, so I'm able to understand the technical aspects," she says.

The 43-year-old mother of two lives in Granite Bay with her husband and young children.

Prior to going to law school, Lyon had already enjoyed a varied and successful academic and professional career. She earned her bachelor's degree in engineering from California State University, Chico, in 1988 and a master's degree in business administration from Santa Clara University in 1997.

She worked for a time as an electrical engineer in telecommunications design and as a businessperson doing international startups for an Internet service provider.

Lyon also worked at her family's business, Carrara Marble Company of America, one of the nation's top stonework companies. Lyon opened the company's San Francisco office and oversaw the marble restoration of San Francisco City Hall and the federal building that houses the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in the wake of the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

But she had always felt the law calling, and in 2001 she started law school at Pacific McGeorge.

"I always wanted to go to law school," she says. "I loved the profession. It's a constant learning and energy challenge."

Ready for trial

Daniel Del Rio is ready to make his mark on the world as a trial lawyer. "I'm someone who likes to talk to people, who likes to engage," he says. "The thought of sitting in rooms writing contracts is abhorrent to me.

"I want to be where the action is," he says. "I like challenges. In the courtroom, someone is always trying to

throw something at you that they think you can't handle."

A member of the class of May 2005, Del Rio excelled on both the law school's mock-trial and moot-court teams.

He was planning to become a deputy district attorney, but the first offer to come through was from Dreyer, Babich, Buccola & Callaham, one of Northern California's premier plaintiffs' personal-injury firms and one that features many fellow alums. He jumped at the opportunity. "They said they'd get me into trial as soon as they could," says Del Rio.

The 26-year-old graduated near the top of his law school class in May. He'd come to the Day program here after graduating in 2002 from California State University, San Jose, with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

For a time after college he worked for a medical management company. The CEO of the company, William Tobin, '77, encouraged Del Rio to apply to his legal alma mater.

During law school, Del Rio took part in the Judicial Internship Clinic. He spent most of his time helping Sacramento Superior Court Judge Loren McMaster with the law-and-motion calendar. He also did an externship with Justice George Nicholson of California's 3rd District Court of Appeal in Sacramento.

Del Rio didn't come from a family of lawyers. His father is a doctor and his mother is a nurse practitioner.

"I was kind of a traitor there," says Del Rio with a laugh. "There was

always concern, especially when I

went into per-

sonal injury

law. My par-

ents wanted

to know if I

was going

to be a

medical

malpractice

lawyer.

I had to

tell them I

wasn't, or

I wouldn't

have been

invited to

Thanks-

giving."



Patents are his passion

Nick Zovko studied engineering as an undergraduate, earning his bachelor's degree from the University of Washington in 2001. Yet Zovko says he realized early on he didn't want to be an engineer. Instead he decided to put his engineering skills to use as a lawyer.

"Engineering seemed a little too narrow for me," says Zovko, age 26. "I liked the theory of it, but I knew it would get very specialized and narrow if I went to graduate school."

Zovko's father is a patent lawyer with a solo practice in Federal Way, Washington, a Seattle suburb. His older sister also went to law school at Boston University and works as an airline attorney in Miami.

This exposure to legal practice and an intellectual curiosity about law led Zovko to Pacific McGeorge, where he was one of a select group of Anthony M. Kennedy Fellows given full scholarships based on their academic achievements as undergraduates.

Now Zovko, a May 2005 graduate, is planning to put his training in both engineering and law to use as a new hire at Knobbe Martens Olson & Bear, one of the nation's largest law firms specializing in intellectual property law. Headquartered in Orange County, the firm has 160 lawyers in offices throughout California. Zovko will be working from the firm's Riverside office.

Professor Michael Vitello, for whom Zovko worked as a research assistant, introduced the law student to one of his former students, Michael Guiliana, '97, who is now a partner at Knobbe Martens.

Zovko says he would like to focus on patent work, going to bat for inventors trying to obtain patent protection from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

During his second summer in law school, Zovko worked at Knobbe Martens and accompanied another of the firm's partners—Michael Trenholm, '92, to the government patent office in Washington, DC, to a hearing with patent examiners.

On that occasion, Trenholm and Zovko discussed 12 different patent applications for inventions ranging from semiconductor technology to a new kind of horse saddle that uses air pockets to make the horse more comfortable. The patent office had initially denied patent applications for all the inventions, but the lawyers are hoping to change things through an in-person hearing.

"You're trying to get a patent, but they're not giving you one," Zovko says. "You talk about what the problem is and try to convince them to change their minds."

Hudson Sangree is a freelance writer based in Davis and a graduate of the Northeastern University School of Law.

