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ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

GOLD & BLUE

LAW EDITION

FALL 2024



Legal
Vocations

St. Mary's Law elevates
career paths to new heights



GUTEN MORGEN, SCHOOL OF LAW

For 38 years, students from the St. Mary's University School of Law, alongside other American and European law students, have attended the St. Mary's Institute on World Legal Problems in Innsbruck, Austria, where they learn from lecturers — even U.S. Supreme Court Justices in years past — and visit government offices to get experience in international legal topics.



Photo by Kathrin Baumann



Pictured above: St. Mary's Law J.D. student Yasmine Kulesza takes notes on her computer during the International Commercial Arbitration class taught at the University of Innsbruck in July.

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY
GOLD & BLUE
LAW EDITION

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(Denotes degree from St. Mary's University)

Gold & Blue Law Edition is produced for law alumni and friends by the Office of University Marketing and Communications.

This magazine was produced using paper approved by the Forest Stewardship Council, ensuring these pages come from responsibly managed forests through reforestation, retention or exempting trees from cutting.

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St. Mary's University, as a Catholic Marianist University, fosters the formation of people in faith and educates leaders for the common good through community, integrated liberal arts and professional education, and academic excellence.

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ON THE COVER: International illustrator Matt Murphy takes inspiration from the St. Mary's University School of Law archway and the Ernest A. Raba Law Building to show how the law school and its Office of Career Strategy provide individualized support to J.D. and LL.M. students seeking real-world experience and a fulfilling vocation. The cover story highlights four alumni who have chosen unique career paths as a result of their St. Mary's Law education. Read the cover story on Page 10.

Building paths

for budding ambitions at the School of Law

by **Patricia Roberts, J.D., St. Mary's University School of Law Dean**
and **Charles E. Cantú Distinguished Professor of Law**

As we embark on another academic year, I'm filled with pride reflecting on the diverse accomplishments and pathways our St. Mary's Law alumni take venturing out into their own communities.

Our cover story, *Legal Vocations*, showcases the breadth of legal careers our graduates pursue, from courtroom to corporate. It's a testament to our robust externship programs, alumni who assist students in finding employment and the tireless efforts of our Office of Career Strategy and law faculty in helping students find their true calling.

This issue spotlights several alumni who embody our mission of service and excellence. Steve Chiscano (J.D.'97), now president of the San Antonio Bar Association, demonstrates how determination and a St. Mary's education can lead to remarkable achievements, including preserving the beloved San Fernando Cathedral and serving as Honorary Consul to Spain.

Anietie Akpan (J.D.'13), Director of Corporate Counsel at Mattress Firm, continues to support her alma mater by helping our newly named Hattie Ruth Briscoe Legal Society for Black law students and being active in the Houston Chapter of the Law Alumni Association.

We're honored to welcome the Hon. Samea Hassas, a Visiting International Jurist. Her courageous work in Afghanistan's National Security Court brings a unique perspective to our classrooms. Similarly, Krendra Harralson (M.Jur.'24), a decorated Army veteran and Ms. Texas USA, inspires us with her advocacy for homeless women veterans. The Rev. Balantine Bawel Talang (LL.M.'24), from Bangladesh, who enriches our diverse community, is also featured.

Our faculty continues to push boundaries in legal scholarship, including a provocative article on originalism by



Assistant Professor Michael Smith, J.D., which has sparked important conversations in constitutional law circles. Our alumni, including Lou Cappadona (J.D.'65) and Terry Topham (J.D.'65), share their decision to benefit future generations of law students through their planned giving.

These stories reflect the spirit of St. Mary's Law — a commitment to justice, service and intellectual growth. As we move forward, let's continue to embody these values in our professional and personal lives.

Wishing you all a successful and fulfilling year ahead. ■

CAMPUS NEWS

Local trust donates to fund law clinic position

A donation from a local trust in San Antonio to St. Mary's University School of Law will help fund a new position in the Immigration and Human Rights Clinic, allowing them to expand assistance to the community.

The \$250,000 grant from the Butt Rogers Charitable Trust will help pay for a social worker for three years. The social worker will work with clients to address basic needs, such as housing, medical care, education and employment; and teach clinic students.

Through the Immigration and Human Rights Clinic, law students, with supervised assistance, help income-qualified immigrants and refugees in matters related to Immigration Courts, the Board of Immigration Appeals and the Department of Homeland Security.

Women J.D. students earn top spots across law organizations

Proving that girls do indeed run the world, leadership for several student-led organizations at the School of Law, including the Student Bar Association and the University's law publications, will have strong female leadership for the 2024-2025 academic year.

The five executive positions for the Student Bar Association — president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and elections commissioner — and nine of the 12 executive positions at the *St. Mary's Law Journal* will be held by women.

The Student Bar Association works toward ensuring an excellent student experience. The *St. Mary's Law Journal* has published articles cited by numerous state appellate courts, the Texas Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court for more than 50 years.

The editors for the law school's other law publications, *The Scholar: St. Mary's Law Review on Race and Social Justice* and *St. Mary's Journal on Legal Malpractice and Ethics*, are also women for the academic year.



On the far right, Peyton Fulgium (J.D. '24) snaps a selfie with other graduates at the School of Law Commencement in May. Fulgium was Symposium Editor of *The Scholar: St. Mary's Law Review on Race and Social Justice*, Vol. 26.



Sara E. Dysart

St. Mary's Trustee to chair Texas Bar Foundation Fellows

St. Mary's University Trustee and alumna Sara E. Dysart (B.A. '74, J.D. '81) has been elected to the 2024-2025 Fellows Chair of the Texas Bar Foundation.

Nominations are based on contributions to the legal profession and commitment to

the community and must be elected by the Texas Bar Foundation Board of Trustees. Nominees are selected from the 17 State Bar of Texas districts.

Dysart was recognized by the University as a Distinguished Graduate in 2019 and by the School of Law as a Distinguished Law Graduate in 2021.

Dysart is a member of the Board of Directors of Broadway Bank and the Texas Bar College, and serves with local nonprofits.

Advocacy Program makes history with No. 1 ABA ranking



For the first time in St. Mary's University School of Law history, the Advocacy Program, known as the National Team, has tied for the No. 1 ranking in the nation by the American Bar Association.

The ABA announcement capped a historic year for the Advocacy Program, which brought home a dozen national championships and represented the United States internationally during the 2023-2024 academic year.

"We are thrilled that our Advocacy Program tied with Texas Tech as the best in the nation, capping off a meteoric rise in recent years," said St. Mary's School of Law Dean Patricia Roberts, J.D. "This top ranking reflects the exceptional dedication of our students and faculty in honing their skills across trial advocacy, appellate advocacy and dispute resolution."

The ABA's annual rankings of advocacy programs are based on participation, hosting and awards earned in competitions focusing on client counseling, negotiation, mediation, arbitration and appellate advocacy.

This year, St. Mary's Law tied with the Texas Tech University School of Law for the ABA's top spot with the highest points ever scored. During the 2022-2023 academic year, the St. Mary's Advocacy Program was ranked fourth in the nation and has been in the top 10 for the past six years.

The St. Mary's Law Advocacy Program includes the Board of Advocates, National, International and Organizational Moot Court teams, National Dispute Resolution, Trial Advocacy teams and a robust advocacy curriculum, which prepares students to become practice-ready attorneys through training and regional, national and international competitions against other law schools.

The School of Law also became the first in ABA history to advance a team to a national final in all five competition areas during the 2023-2024 academic year. The Advocacy Program set

a school record by winning 12 championships in a year, with 15 J.D. students receiving individual awards for their work.

"Being ranked No. 1 by the ABA for the first time is a monumental achievement," said Assistant Dean for Advocacy Programs and Conflict Resolution A.J. Bellido de Luna, J.D. "We sent seven teams to ABA National Finals in five different areas of law. No other law school in history has done that — but St. Mary's did. This tremendous success reflects years of building a program with support from the local legal community, the San Antonio Bar, Texas Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates and the American College of Trial Lawyers. It also demonstrates the hard work and dedication of our students and coaches."

In April, the National Dispute Resolution Team — composed of Max Massey (J.D. '24), Jacklyn Dhaemers (J.D. '24) and now-third-year J.D. student Delaney Montez — represented the United States at the International Client Counseling Competition in Poland. This team reached the semi-finals and competed against teams from England, Germany, New Zealand, Nigeria and others.

The Advocacy Program gives law students valuable advocacy experience by allowing them to practice in real-world settings before judges and juries.



Scan to read about Massey's journey from broadcast journalism to law school and international advocacy competition.

From left, third-year J.D. student Delaney Montez, Max Massey (J.D. '24) and Jacklyn Dhaemers (J.D. '24) represented the School of Law's National Dispute Resolution Team, winning a national championship and contributing to the top ranking.



Photo by Robin Jerstad

J.D. and Master of Public Health dual degree to launch in 2025

St. Mary's University, in collaboration with UTHealth Houston School of Public Health, will create a new dual degree program allowing students to earn a Doctor of Jurisprudence and a Master of Public Health (J.D./M.P.H.)

The new J.D./M.P.H. program is scheduled to launch in Fall 2025 and will cater to students interested in specializing in law and health policy. It will focus on teaching students skills such as encompassing legal analysis, policy advocacy and public health strategy.

“The J.D./M.P.H. program is an exciting cross-institution interdisciplinary initiative that will prepare lawyers seeking to impact health policy, including ensuring health outcomes for the underserved,” said Patricia Roberts, J.D., St. Mary's Law Dean and Charles E. Cantú Distinguished Professor of Law.

The two institutions will also offer a joint Master of Jurisprudence and Master of Public Health (M.Jur./M.P.H.), the first of its kind in Texas. This program is one of only two degree programs in the state certified by the Compliance Certification Board and is scheduled to begin Spring 2025.

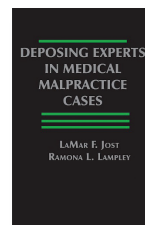
UTHealth Houston School of Public Health



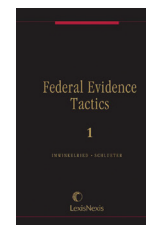
Law faculty in the books

Beyond the classroom, St. Mary's University School of Law faculty conduct research and share their knowledge through various publications both online and in print. Here is a sampling of those books, articles and papers published between May 2023 and April 2024. For more, visit bit.ly/law-publications.

BOOKS



Ramona Lampley, J.D., and LaMar Jost, J.D., wrote *Deposing Experts in Medical Malpractice Cases*, Juris Publishing, 2023.



Ramona Lampley, J.D., and Ed Imwinkelried, J.D., wrote *Federal Evidence Tactics*, LexisNexis, 2024.

ARTICLES

- **Matthew “Match” Dawson, J.D.**, wrote *Gun Range Immunity: An Argument Against Legalized Nuisance and Non-Government Takings* for the *Gonzaga Legal Review*, 2023.
- **Vincent Johnson, J.D., LL.M., LL.D.**, wrote *Artificial Intelligence and Legal Malpractice Liability* for the *St. Mary's Journal on Legal Malpractice and Ethics*, 2024.
- **Ramona Lampley, J.D.**, wrote *A Haven for Traffickers: How the United States Provides a Legal Safe Haven for Businesses That Rely on Forced Labor in the International Supply Chain* for the *Pepperdine Law Review*, 2024.
- **Adam J. MacLeod, J.D.**, wrote *The First Amendment, Discrimination, and Public Accommodations at Common Law* for the *Kentucky Law Journal*, 2024.
- **Patricia W. Moore, J.D.**, wrote *Can Litigation Analytics Tell Us Whatever Became of the 2015 Proportionality Amendments to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure?* for the *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Public Affairs*, 2024.
- **Willy Rice, J.D.**, wrote *The Emerging Name, Image, and Likeness Industry and the Perils of Appropriating “Entrepreneurial”*

Collegiate Athletes’ and “Vengeful” Minors’ Property Interest — Historical and Empirical Guidance from Courts’ Right of Publicity, Misappropriation, and Breach of Contract Decisions, 1830–2023 for the *Berkeley Journal of Entertainment and Sports Law*, 2024.

- **Michael Smith, J.D.**, wrote *Library Crime* for the *Drake Law Review*, 2024.
- **Amanda Stephens, J.D., and Sean Viña, Ph.D.**, wrote *On Women Professors Who Teach Legal Writing: Addressing Stigma and Women's Health* for the *Vermont Law Review*, 2024.
- **Jennifer Stevenson, J.D.; Qian Li, Ph.D., and Jianyu Zhou** wrote *Assessing Legal Protection of Biometric Data in China: Gaps, Principles, and Policy Recommendations* for the *Journal of Legal Medicine*, 2024.
- **Sigrid Vendrell-Polanco, J.D.**, wrote *Puerto Rican Presidential Voting Rights: Why Precedent Should Be Overturned, and Other Options for Suffrage*, for the *Brooklyn Law Review*, 2024.
- **Gregory Zlotnick, J.D.**, wrote *Inviting the People into People's Court: Embracing Non-Attorney Representation in Eviction Proceedings* for the *Marquette Benefits and Social Welfare Law Review*, 2023.

FIRM Support

School of Law helps build on alumna's service-minded efforts

by Suzi Morales, J.D.

Serving others is central to who Anietie Akpan (J.D. '13) is. You can see it in her work, how she talks about her family and why she chose the St. Mary's University School of Law.

Akpan recently became Director of Corporate Counsel at Mattress Firm, helping the company with a range of legal issues while also maintaining an active pro bono docket.

Influences for good

As a daughter of Nigerian immigrants, Akpan grew up in Houston and was influenced by watching her parents navigate the legal maze of the naturalization process.

She learned other lessons from her parents, like seeing her mother take off a sweater to give to someone who needed it. Though Akpan's mother died shortly after she graduated from law school, Akpan vividly remembered her mother sharing the joy of her St. Mary's Law acceptance letter and dancing with her in the living room.

"My mother had such a servant's heart, and that has shaped me in every way, especially how I practice law."

Akpan chose St. Mary's Law, in part, because of its strong community. As a J.D. student, she worked alongside Law Chaplain Sister Grace Walle, F.M.I., D.Min., to organize Law Ministry events from community service to social activities.

"The Law Ministry Office really anchored my experience at school and influenced my perspective on what the law can do and what the law student experience could be like," Akpan said.

Opportunities for service

Akpan began her career with broad-based litigation experience for a firm specializing in family and education law. She loved using her research and writing skills and wanted to apply those to clients' business decisions.

She moved to the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, where she enjoyed the combination of in-house transactional work and interaction with consumers.

Now at Mattress Firm in Houston, Akpan said she has "so much fun" with matters ranging from corporate and securities to e-commerce and merchandising. With her orientation toward service, she appreciates that much of the work she does is consumer-facing.



Photo by Robin Jerstad

▲ Anietie Akpan (J.D. '13), Director of Corporate Counsel at Mattress Firm, visits the showroom of the company's headquarters in Houston.

"I found the right blend of the type of law, the skills and the customer/client in this particular position I have now," she said. "I'm so very grateful."

Outside of the office, Akpan works pro bono on transactional and estate planning matters. She said even busy attorneys in private practice can find time to provide legal services to people who might not otherwise be able to afford them.

"It's really about finding opportunities that are digestible," she said. "A lot of times with those estate planning clients, they just need very basic advanced planning docs, and those are things I can work on a little bit each weekend."

One through line in her career has been her focus on service, whether it is at work considering the perspectives of consumers or through volunteer activities.

"St. Mary's was a big influence on my decision to incorporate volunteer and pro bono work into everything I do," she said. "St. Mary's really planted that seed in me." ■



DR. ALFONSO CHISCANO
AND FAMILY

FAMILY TRADITION



Canary Island roots fuel alumnus' passion for San Antonio

by *Nathaniel Miller*

Steve Chiscano (J.D. '97) may know more about San Antonio's history and its ties to Spain than anyone else.

His love for the city runs deep: he served as president of the San Antonio Bar Association and as chairman of the board of the Historical Centre Foundation, formed to preserve San Fernando Cathedral in downtown San Antonio.

His father, renowned heart surgeon Alfonso Chiscano, M.D., originally from the Canary Islands, chose San Antonio as his home after learning about the city and San Fernando's historical ties to his home country, and worked incessantly to increase awareness of that connection.

Steve Chiscano has continued his father's work while carving out his own path in law and preserving the influence of Canary Islanders on San Antonio's history.

"For my dad, being a Canary Islander, it made sense for him to go to a place where his people showed up hundreds of years ago and began an entire civil government system that we enjoy today," Chiscano said.

MORE THAN A TEST SCORE

After double majoring in International Business and Spanish at The University of Texas at Austin, Chiscano will be the first to tell you his LSAT scores could have been better when applying for law school.

He petitioned the St. Mary's School of Law dean at the time for a meeting.

He finally got his chance.

"I knew if I could get in there and get some time, I would be able to put my best foot forward," he said.

Chiscano was placed in a summer preparatory program taught by then-Professor of Law Charles E. Cantú and was fully accepted to start classes in Fall 1994. He made the most of the opportunity. Working as a student clerk throughout law school, Chiscano also participated in the Advocacy Program and received an internship at the Supreme Court of Texas as a third-year J.D. student.

Now practicing commercial law at Gonzalez Chiscano Angulo & Kasson, PC, Chiscano said St. Mary's taught him how best to break down complex issues.

"Without the tools, without the teachers and without the love that was given to me during my time at St. Mary's, I wouldn't have a law practice, and I wouldn't have the things I do now," Chiscano said.

KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE

In the early 2000s, San Fernando Cathedral — home of the law school's annual Red Mass marking the start of the judicial year — needed significant repairs.

As a board member and later chair of the board with the organization formed to preserve the cathedral, Chiscano and the group helped raise millions for the campaign.

With every member of his family baptized in the cathedral's original

baptism font brought over from the Canary Islands, this family tradition was only one of many reasons he was eager to help.

"Our family's name is under one of the stained-glass windows," Chiscano said. "We've supported San Fernando ever since I can remember."

In 2020, Chiscano was appointed Honorary Consul of Spain in San Antonio by the Spanish government, where he has helped provide diplomatic and counseling services to Spanish citizens in the United States.

Sister Grace Walle, F.M.I., D.Min., the St. Mary's School of Law Chaplain and organizer of Red Mass, said Chiscano has always been more than willing to help.

In 1997, he and his graduating cohort helped establish the Cantú Fund for the Future, which helps fund the Office of Law Campus Ministry events.

"Steve lives out the Marianist mission through all his involvements in our legal and faith community in San Antonio," Walle said.

With his name on his practice and a government-issued title, Chiscano said one of the reasons he plans to continue his preservation efforts is because it's a way to give back to the community.

"St. Mary's taught us servant leadership and humility," he said. "Sometimes we forget that we should walk humbly through life and be grateful." ■

Steve Chiscano (J.D. '97) stands near a stained-glass window in San Fernando Cathedral in downtown San Antonio bearing the name of his late father, Alfonso Chiscano, M.D. After moving his family to San Antonio for work, Alfonso Chiscano dedicated his time to raising awareness of the city's connection to the Canary Islands.

Legal Vocations

St. Mary's Law elevates career paths to new heights

Stories by Catherine Deyarmond

Illustrations by Matt Murphy



“They push us to develop our interview skills and to research legal vocations, so we find the right place in the legal field.”

— Elizabeth Medellin, third-year J.D. student

When prospective students tour the St. Mary’s University School of Law, Robin Thorner, J.D., Assistant Dean for Career Strategy, describes law school as too long and too difficult to take just any job after graduating.

Students who do not actively pursue finding the best legal vocation for their strengths and skills will not “make for happy lawyers who feel like they are really providing meaningful work and contributing to the community,” Thorner said. “With that in mind, we are very focused on students’ individual journeys.”

Helping students find their path, the School of Law’s Office of Career Strategy provides highly individualized support to J.D. and LL.M. students as they seek real-world experience to find a fulfilling vocation, said Thorner, who oversees the office.

“We meet with every student every year they are here,” she said. “We believe strongly that the outcomes justify the very intensive student support service. Our team helps with all the traditional job application tasks and related materials, reviews résumés and cover letters, performs mock interviews, and provides tremendous resources in print and video for students.”

During the 2023-2024 academic year, the four Career Strategy team members provided 834 one-on-one student advising appointments and reviewed 518 résumés.

With programming around different practice areas and environments available to students, those in the J.D. and LL.M. programs can learn about myriad practice areas and employee types — practicing attorneys, sitting judges and others who use their law degrees in alternative ways.

Students are exposed to the law fields during career fairs, on-campus job interviews, employer engagement on campus, Mentor Circles programming and mock interviews.

On the following pages, you’ll meet four J.D. alumni who have taken their careers in very different directions — appellate court, big law, global trade compliance and in-house corporate

counsel — using the lessons they’ve learned at the School of Law.

Law graduates are finding their place in legal vocations. For the J.D. Class of 2023, 86.8% of graduates were employed 10 months after graduation.

St. Mary’s students find careers at law firms of all sizes, in business and industry, government, public interest organizations, federal clerkships and educational entities. The majority of graduates are working in Texas, though some move out of state.

As a student with no attorneys in his family, Richard Lyons, a second-year J.D. student, said he became involved with the Office of Career Strategy almost immediately upon starting school.

“I’ve been able to learn about the different legal fields, and I’ve had the opportunity to meet lawyers from all kinds of firms,” he said. “Meeting these attorneys on campus can lead to genuine job opportunities.”

Lyons said he spent the summer as a legal intern for a local bankruptcy judge. He is doing an Externship for class credit this academic year with Spurs Sports & Entertainment. A summer on-campus interview has already led to a job offer next summer at a local attorney’s office.

Elizabeth Medellin, a third-year J.D. student, said she figured out during the spring of her first year that she could benefit from using the law school’s resources.

“We get so busy and don’t think we need help,” she said. “The Office of Career Strategy has taught me I can seek assistance throughout the law school.”

The office staff first helped her with her résumé and later to find a mentor with whom she still regularly talks, Medellin said.

“The law school staff members really care,” Medellin said. “They are very knowledgeable and are more than willing to help students in any area. They push us to develop our interview skills and to research legal vocations so we find the right place in the legal field.”





Varied vocations

Alumni from the St. Mary's University School of Law practice where their vocation calls them after graduation — from Big Law to business. The following employment outcomes, submitted to the American Bar Association from 2020 to 2023 by the Office of Career Strategy, offer a snapshot of how graduates launch their careers 10 months after earning their J.D.



Office of Career Strategy 2023-2024 outreach



834

One-on-one student
advising appointments



518

Résumé
reviews

A dynamic alternative

Alumnus thrives in international trade compliance



After earning his undergraduate degree at St. Mary's University, Robert Dunlap (B.A. '06, M.A. '11, J.D. '11) decided to return to campus to combine his interest in law and his love of international relations.

In 2011, Dunlap completed the St. Mary's University School of Law J.D./M.A. in International Relations Joint Degree Program. With his education and passion for law and international relations, Dunlap has developed a successful career in international trade compliance.

"St. Mary's prepared me in ways I didn't foresee," he said. "It is all very serendipitous."

The Joint Degree Program with the International Relations component was created in response to the internationalization of relations among the countries of the world, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the globalization of the world's economy. These factors resulted in an increased need for lawyers who have an international perspective on the practice of law.

After law school, Dunlap said he spent 10 years working for a San Antonio manufacturer with operations in Mexico, where he learned a lot.

While working on his J.D./M.A. degrees, Dunlap said he took one class held entirely in Spanish.

"Little did I know I would later be working with a company on the border," he said. "I was well prepared to work with Mexican laws."

When Dunlap started looking for his next career opportunity, he was approached by a representative from West Pharmaceutical Services.

"They saw something in my background and skill set they needed, plus they liked that I had dabbled in information technology."

For the last two years, Dunlap has served as manager of global trade compliance for West Pharmaceutical Services. He works remotely from his home in San Antonio and travels twice a year to the company's headquarters in Exton, Pennsylvania.

The global manufacturer of injectable medicines has seven sites in the U.S. as well as in Europe, the European Union, Asia, Central and South America.

Dunlap said he is responsible for ensuring the company stays compliant and follows the spirit of the law in all jurisdictions around the world where the company operates.

"A lot of what we do is cross-functional collaboration between trade compliance, legal and regulatory," he said.

Dunlap describes his work as "extraordinarily dynamic, which is probably an understatement. Every day is different. I think about the jobs where you do the same thing every day. This is the polar opposite of that."

Working in international trade compliance means dealing with emerging regulations around the world that have not been seen before, he said.

"We have to figure out how new regulations will impact our space and our operations," he said. "As soon as we figure one out, a new one is coming around the corner."

For law students or graduates looking for an alternative to practicing in a traditional legal environment, Dunlap said many options exist to use their degrees.

"There are so many options outside of the traditional law firm environment," he said. "Trade compliance is one of them. This is where I found my home. Looking back, I couldn't be happier."



Legal lessons

Alumna finds perfect fit in Big Law

When Gracie Garcia (J.D. '17) began attending the St. Mary's University School of Law, the then-20-year-old had neither lawyers in her family nor experience in law. The idea of figuring out her future legal vocation was daunting until an affinity for certain courses eventually led to her career with Jackson Walker in Fort Worth. Her work fits into what is colloquially called Big Law, the largest and most prestigious law firms in the country.

"I loved the trial and appellate types of courses. They just clicked for me," Garcia said. "I took more than was required. That is when I started thinking that litigation would be my best option."

During law school, Garcia served as a law clerk for Chief Justice Rebeca C. Martinez, J.D., at the Fourth Court of Appeals in San Antonio. She also interned for the Office of the Attorney General of Texas in Fort Worth.

"It all went hand in hand," she said. "I felt comfortable with what I was learning in class and what I was learning during my internship."

After graduating and passing the bar, Garcia became a litigation associate at Kelly Hart in Fort Worth.

After three years in their litigation practice group, she joined Jackson Walker in its Dallas office before an opening a year later allowed her to move back to her hometown of Fort Worth.

At Jackson Walker, Garcia is a versatile trial attorney who serves an array of clients, from individuals to businesses in the public and private sectors. Garcia helps settle general business disputes involving claims, such as breach of contract, negligence and fraud; real-estate disputes involving purchase and sale contracts, lease agreements and construction contracts; and



lender-related disputes involving the enforcement and collection of financial obligations.

She also has experience defending against claims involving personal injury, employment and insurance.

Garcia said St. Mary's law professors prepared her to enjoy a successful litigation career.

Colin Marks, J.D., Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Ernest W. Clemens Professor of Law, taught Garcia commercial business dispute courses, such as contracts and secured transactions.

"I learned so much from him that I have even reached out to him now as an attorney to ask his opinion," Garcia said.

She said she also remembered Professor of Law John Teeter Jr., J.D., who taught torts. "I didn't think that the personal injury aspect was what I wanted to do, but the nuances that play into litigation were concepts I understood and felt comfortable with," she said. "I found I really loved torts."

Garcia said she is grateful for her time at St. Mary's, and everyone who helped her while she was there.

"The support I found at St. Mary's helped guide my decision to go into litigation," she said. "I found the best career for me."



Corporate counsel

Diverse legal background perfect preparation for in-house role



When he was in his third year at the St. Mary's University School of Law, Stephen Hebert (J.D. '14) started working for a San Antonio personal injury firm.

After receiving his Supervised Practice Card, Hebert spent his last semester of law school serving as an attorney under the oversight of a licensed Texas attorney.

"I enjoyed being a personal injury plaintiff attorney," he said. "It gave me the opportunity to help people and see that side of the coin."

Hebert said his career trajectory changed the day he received his bar exam results.

"After I got my results, an insurance defense firm made me a job offer," Hebert said. "I went from plaintiff to defense."

When he made the change, Hebert said he kept in mind advice from experienced attorneys who shared the value of working in both defense and prosecution roles.

After three years at the insurance defense firm, Hebert moved to Houston when the firm where his wife, Lariza Pruneda Hebert (J.D. '15), worked closed its San Antonio office. They both found jobs in Houston. Stephen Hebert worked at a

defense litigation firm for three years before moving to his current role in 2022 as corporate counsel for litigation at Landry's Inc.'s headquarters.

"I manage a nationwide litigation docket for all locations," he said. "If something happens at one of our 600 locations nationwide, it ends up on my desk. I have to go to that particular jurisdiction and find an attorney. That gives me the opportunity to network with attorneys all over the country and see all the nuances in the law."

Hebert said he enjoys being a part of a team and having the opportunity to build relationships within the company.

With another in-house attorney, Hebert shares the legal work involving Landry's properties, which includes restaurants, casinos, hotels and theme parks.

He handles general liability lawsuits encompassing premises, personal injury and contract work.

For students or new attorneys interested in working as an in-house attorney, Hebert recommends first working at a private firm.

"Companies value attorneys who have done one thing a thousand times instead of doing a thousand things one time," he said. "If you want to be an in-house attorney from the beginning, it's not really realistic. You need to figure out how the legal system works, whether it is trying cases or another area of legal work. Real-world private practice experience is very important."

Hebert, who was named a 2024 10 Under 10 Honoree by the School of Law Graduates of the Last Decade (GOLD) Council, credited the School of Law for preparing him for a fulfilling career.

Although he grew up in Louisiana, his father, Joseph "J.P." P. Hebert, J.D. (B.B.A. '77), grew up in San Antonio and attended St. Mary's before becoming a tax and bankruptcy attorney in Lafayette, Louisiana.

"St. Mary's was the best thing that ever happened to me. I set myself up for success for the rest of my life," he said. "I met my wife there. I still have a bunch of lifelong friends who live in San Antonio, and I couldn't have hoped for a better experience."



Meant for the bench

Former prosecutor fulfills dream as judge



In middle school, the Hon. Lori Valenzuela (J.D. '98) already knew she wanted to be a lawyer with aspirations of becoming a judge.

By high school, Valenzuela had set her sights on first becoming a prosecutor.

"I understood it would take a long time and lots of work to become a judge," she said.

After earning her undergraduate degree at The University of Texas at Austin, she said the St. Mary's University School of Law was the right place to make her childhood dreams a reality.

Valenzuela now serves as a justice on the Fourth Court of Appeals in San Antonio and is one of seven justices in an appellate court that presides over 32 counties.

She was appointed to the court in 2021 to fill a vacancy and was then elected to the office in 2022.

Valenzuela attributed her preparedness for becoming a prosecutor to her classes in evidence and trial advocacy, citing the lessons she learned from Professor Emeritus David Schlueter, J.D.

"I gained much-needed tools and skills, and I am very grateful I took those classes," she said. "I also had an opportunity while in school to work at the District Attorney's Office. After my first year, I was a paid intern working 20 hours a week while attending school until I graduated and was hired as a prosecutor."

"Once I got here, I loved the community and its environment built on faith."

Coincidentally, she met her husband, Sean McCleskey (J.D. '98), while they were both interning at the DA's Office. Their daughter is following in the family tradition as a second-year J.D. student at St. Mary's.

After 11 years at the District Attorney's Office, Valenzuela opened a practice in criminal defense work.

In 2009, then-Texas Gov. Rick Perry approved the creation of three district courts in Bexar County by the Texas Legislature. Perry appointed Valenzuela to the newly created 437th District Court, presiding over felony cases for Bexar County.

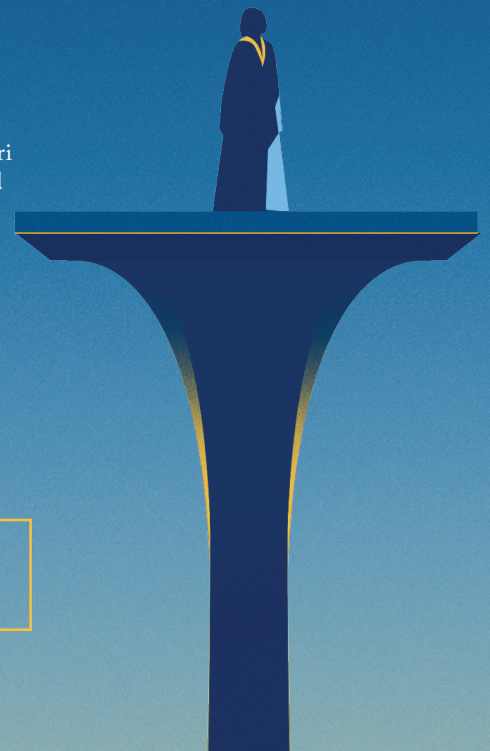
Then, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott appointed her to the Fourth Court of Appeals in 2021, where she said she still enjoys serving her community as a judge.

"As long as we do it the way we should with a faithfulness to the law and to the Constitution, we are serving everyone with integrity and fairness," she said. "It is a wonderful opportunity and blessing to be a part of this. St. Mary's prepared me for this journey."

Her father, Maj. Gen. Alfred A. Valenzuela (B.A. '70, M.A. '79), U.S. Army, Ret., earned both degrees in Political Science at St. Mary's. During law school, Lori Valenzuela and her brother, Alfred A. Valenzuela II (B.A. '96) were roommates.

"Initially, coming to St. Mary's was because of its location and our family connection," she said. "Once I got here, I loved the community and its environment built on faith." ■

To view photographs of those illustrated on these pages, visit stmarytx.edu/magazine.





The Original

Professor Michael Smith shares unique study of originalism

by Catherine Deyarmond

An unusually named law review article on originalism by a St. Mary's University School of Law faculty member has raised some academic eyebrows, drawing interest from law scholars, media members and social media followers across the country.

Earlier this year, Michael Smith, J.D., St. Mary's Assistant Professor of Law, submitted his article, *Is Originalism Bullsh**?*, and soon received word it was accepted by the *Lewis & Clark Law Review*.

Originalism is an interpretation of a constitution, especially the U.S. Constitution, that aims to follow how it would have been understood at the time it was written.

"I enjoy writing, and I think it is important," he said, adding this article has garnered the greatest attention and downloads thus far of his writing. "I like becoming part of the broader conversation."

Albert Kauffman, J.D., a St. Mary's Professor of Law with expertise on civil rights and the U.S. Supreme Court, said Smith's article "exposed me to a new body of literature."

"Michael made his points in a very interesting way that keeps your attention," Kauffman said. "He is a great asset to our school."

Smith joined the St. Mary's Law faculty in August 2023, teaching and conducting research in criminal law and criminal procedure. He previously worked at the University of Idaho College of Law and as a civil litigation attorney.

He also enjoys studying constitutional law, including constitutional interpretation, originalism and state constitutional law. Smith's work has appeared in the *Brooklyn Law Review*, *Pepperdine Law Review*, *Penn State Law Review* and the *Harvard Journal on Legislation*.

This latest work on originalism is an extension of his area of focus since 2021. He said the idea for the latest article came "from studying philosophy as an undergraduate and becoming interested in free will and moral responsibility." From there, he discovered the work of American philosopher Harry Frankfurt, who wrote a classic essay that became a best-selling book titled, *On Bullsh***.

Still wondering what Smith's article is all about? The abstract says it all.

"This article draws on the surprisingly robust literature examining the definition, essence and significance of bullsh** and evaluates whether originalist constitutional interpretation fits the bill," Smith said. "I begin with Harry Frankfurt's definition of bullsh** as utterances made in pursuit of the speaker's goals without regard for their truth value."

On Page One, Smith poses the question, "Is Originalism Bullsh**?" and answers affirmatively. Smith said he wanted to write in a way that drew attention so it would appeal to a wider audience.

"I thought it would be a fun little essay," he said. "Famous last words. It turned out to be a full-fledged article."

And an original one at that. ■

Scan to read Smith's article.

Editor's note: Asterisks have been used to replace two letters in the profanity for inclusion in this magazine.



KENEDY EAST LAW



Photo by Lucero Salinas

DANGEROUS WORK

The Hon. Samea Hassas, family flee the Taliban and find new home at St. Mary's

by Nathaniel Miller

You wouldn't know it at first glance, but the Hon. Samea Hassas has helped sentence some of the most violent criminals in Afghanistan.

As one of the hundreds of female judges who sentenced members of the Taliban in the two decades after they were removed from power, Hassas would regularly receive threats from those imprisoned and their families simply for being a woman enforcing the law.

When the Taliban returned to power in 2021, Hassas and her family fled Kabul and took refuge in South Korea before finding a new home in San Antonio and with the St. Mary's University School of Law.

"I really love the University, and when I'm there, the people make me feel very good," Hassas said.

ESCAPE FROM AFGHANISTAN

When the Taliban first took control in 1996, Hassas was a law student at Kabul University with a year left in her law studies. She was forced to stop due to the group's refusal to allow women to get an education.

Unable to attend classes, she continued learning other subjects through an underground network in her spare time. It wasn't until 2001 when the U.S.-led coalition expelled the Taliban that she was able to return to the university, picking up where she left off.

After graduating and working with the court system, Hassas was appointed to a judgeship where she oversaw criminal cases, including those of former Taliban members.

"I knew about the dangers and challenges, knowing I could be killed," she said. "They would ask me, 'How can a woman judge me?' because of their stance against women."

After the withdrawal of American troops from the country in 2021 and as the Taliban began to retake control of the country, many of those prisoners were released, looking for retribution.

Using local connections to help them get past security checkpoints, Hassas, her husband Ramish Noori, and their three children left their home, possessions and family behind to seek asylum in another country. It took them three weeks before finally securing a flight out of the country with the help of South Korean officials.

"I KNEW ABOUT THE DANGERS AND CHALLENGES, KNOWING I COULD BE KILLED. THEY WOULD ASK ME, 'HOW CAN A WOMAN JUDGE ME?' BECAUSE OF THEIR STANCE AGAINST WOMEN."

The couple was soon put into contact with St. Mary's University School of Law Dean Patricia Roberts, J.D. However, an overburdened vetting process delayed their travel to the United States significantly.

"When we arrived in Korea, we had to stay in a camp for five months," said Noori, who was president of Edrak Institute of Higher Learning in Kabul when they fled. "We received some contacts from the International Association of Women Judges in Washington, D.C., who introduced us to Patricia Roberts."

SHARING HER STORY

Now, as a Visiting Scholar at the School of Law, Hassas gives guest lectures and presentations, sharing her experiences with students and the public. The program also allows Visiting Scholars to conduct research and build connections in the local and state legal communities.

The family has been settling into life in San Antonio. Noori is teaching a course at the law school. Hassas said their three children speak Persian, Korean and English and have enjoyed attending school.

Hassas has also been working with Associate Director of the Intensive English Program Catherine Whitlow to improve her English. Whitlow said Hassas is an inspiration who continues to find new ways to move forward.

"Samea has faced unbelievable, life-threatening challenges over the last few years, but she has not surrendered to sorrow," Whitlow said. "Instead, she has become a beacon of justice and hope for those privileged to know her."

The couple has continued with the asylum process, noting they cannot return home because they are deemed enemies of the state by the Taliban. They hope to keep building their new life in San Antonio.

"The children enjoy spending time with their classmates and teachers, and the people in the city have been so kind," Hassas said. "The University staff members and leadership are so kind, and we love being with them and working with them." ■

First class

— COMPETITOR —

Law alumna uses platform to advocate for female veterans' health

by Michelle Mondo

Krendra Harralson (M.Jur. '24) thought she would still be climbing the ranks in the U.S. Army, but an unexpected medical diagnosis sent her on a different path: earning a pageant competition title and heading back to college in her 40s.

Harralson walked the St. Mary's University Commencement stage in May as her husband and 10-year-old son cheered from the crowd. Her 14-year-old son sat behind her, placing her academic hood when it was time. Her 24-year-old son was unable to attend.

Harralson applied to the Master of Jurisprudence Program because the course work would give her a good foundation for helping those she considers the most vulnerable, with a focus on improving health care for older adults and pregnant women.

"I chose this program because I see myself helping to write legislation to improve health care," she said.

A DESIRE TO SERVE

The path from serving her country as a combat medic — including deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan — to competing in pageant competitions and finding a new calling at St. Mary's University began at a young age.

"As a little girl, I saw myself being in the Army," said Harralson, who grew up in Tacoma, Washington. "I had a big *M*A*S*H* poster on my wall and posters about the Army Corps nurses. I didn't realize when I first enlisted at 17 that I would be retired at 38."



Harralson dreamed of becoming the first woman Sergeant Major of the Army. Instead, after being diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 2016, Harralson medically retired as a sergeant first class.

In the military, if service members are diagnosed with a health condition that renders them unable to perform their duties, they are required to medically retire. Studies have shown forced retirement can lead to a difficult transition to the civilian world, both financially and emotionally.

Harralson experienced a deep depression. Her husband, also in the Army, tried to find ways to get her to connect with other veterans. She reconnected with a previous supervisor who had competed in pageants and who encouraged Harralson to go for it.

WEARING THE CROWN

One day before registration for Ms. Veteran America 2023 closed, Harralson submitted her packet. She placed in the top 10. She is currently the reigning Mrs. Texas in the Mrs. USA (Mrs. United Service Ambassador) pageant and competed for the Mrs. USA title in Omaha, Nebraska, in August 2024, earning second runner-up.

Creating a pageant platform spurred Harralson to find her newest passion: advocating for women veterans living with depression or housing insecurity.

She also appreciated how much her St. Mary's Law advisers and professors helped her along the way to set new career goals.

"St. Mary's professors really seem to live the Marianist life, the way they talk to us, the way they act and the community engagement and involvement," she said.

Assistant Dean for Graduate Law Programs Shannon Sevier (M.P.A. '21, J.D. '07), who taught Harralson, said she embodies the Marianist tradition of the University.

"Ms. Harralson is the manifestation of service: civic service, military service and peer mentorship," Sevier said. "She is an example of hard work and self-determination. Her arc of achievement, leadership and service has just started."

While she is moving on to her next chapter to pursue a doctorate, Harralson said she will always cherish her time on the campus.

"My heart was full just being there," she said. ■

FORMER CLASSMATES GIVE BACK TO SCHOOL OF LAW

DUO'S PLANNED GIFTS WILL HELP FUTURE LAW STUDENTS

St. Mary's University School of Law classmates Lou Cappadona (J.D. '65) and Terry Topham (J.D. '65) credit much of their success and lifelong friendships to their alma mater, inspiring them to make a planned gift through a charitable bequest.

Cappadona's career included time with the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps, the National Labor Relations Board, and his own human resources consulting service, to name a few. Topham's career has been with what is now Davidson Troilo Ream & Garza.

Q: Why did you choose St. Mary's Law for your studies?

Cappadona: I was in the U.S. Army working in the Judge Advocate Office during the day at Fort Sam Houston and had the opportunity to attend summer and night classes while working.

Q: What is one thing you enjoyed during your time at St. Mary's Law?

Topham: There was an opportunity to get to know your fellow classmates and faculty at a personal level beyond the classroom.

Q: Why do you feel giving back to the School of Law is important?

Topham: Our alumni have every reason to be proud of this law school by looking at its accomplishments. It's getting national attention, and that could not have been imagined in our wildest dreams back when we were in law school.

Cappadona: St. Mary's gave two gifts to me: a full scholarship and an education. When you get gifted twice, you have to give back.

The decision by Topham and Cappadona to donate to the School of Law through planned giving allows us to celebrate their generosity. For additional information on planned giving, charitable bequests or other options for including the School of Law in your will or estate plan, contact Anthony Alcoser at 210-431-4361 or aalcoser@stmarytx.edu.



From left, St. Mary's University School of Law donors Lou Cappadona (J.D. '65), Mary Anne Crosby (J.D. '65), Terry Topham (J.D. '65) and Don Wittig (B.A. '63, J.D. '65) get together during the 2024 Law Weekend and Reunion.

Peace, justice and priesthood

Marianist ideals draw Bangladeshi priest to LL.M. Program

by Catherine Deyarmond



Photo by Robin Jerstad

In his quest to assist those most in need of peace and law ministry in his homeland of Bangladesh, a missionary priest found the perfect place to continue his education — the St. Mary's University School of Law.

This summer, the Rev. Balentine Bawel Talang, O.M.I., LL.B. (LL.M. '24), who was born and raised in the Khasi indigenous community in Bangladesh, earned an LL.M. in International and Comparative Law. An LL.M. degree allows those with a J.D. or the equivalent in their home country to continue specialized legal study at St. Mary's Law.

"I decided to come to St. Mary's University to study law because of the ideals of the Marianists who established the University," Talang said. "The elements that characterize the Marianist approach to education spoke to me, especially educating for service, justice and peace. I knew this was the right place for me."

In 2010, Talang was ordained a priest with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Bangladesh. The order chose Talang to carry on their peace and law ministry, enabling him to earn his LL.B. in 2013 in Bangladesh and continue his international law studies abroad.

Talang said he received assistance in applying and enrolling at St. Mary's from Jennifer Stevenson, J.D., Assistant Dean for International Programs. Stevenson said Talang came to St. Mary's to expand his knowledge of common law and merge it with his religious calling.

"He really is a delight, and the students enjoyed having him in class," Stevenson said. "He adapted well to student life and is a very positive person."

Talang's study of international and comparative law has led him back to his origins.

"I wanted to learn about treaties and international law," he said. "As members of an indigenous community, we find that people are struggling with their rights and even their existence. I wish to continue doing peace and justice ministry when I return home." ■

◀ The Rev. Balentine Bawel Talang, O.M.I., LL.B. (LL.M. '24), of Bangladesh, visits Guadalupe Chapel on the St. Mary's University campus as he wraps up his study of International and Comparative Law.