CUNY’S IMPACT AT 30

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- Advocating for American Muslims
- Promoting Women’s Rights in Haiti
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**On the Cover:** Pavita Krishnaswamy ('02)
Places Matter

Over the past year, we’ve settled into our new home at Court Square. We’ve come to understand its capabilities, its limitations, and even its quirks. Alumni and friends who visit marvel at its beauty.

Since we moved in, I’ve been thinking about what our new physical space means to us.

This building is more than a facility in which teachers teach and students learn. It plays a starring role in our engagement with alumni, members of the legal profession, and the broader community.

CUNY Law opened its doors 30 years ago and set out on an ambitious path to become a different kind of law school. With our new and more convenient location, it’s time we invited the larger world in.

With that in mind, we are integrating the use of this physical space with our web and electronic media, and the print magazine you are holding, to unveil Public Square, an environment for communicating and interacting with those who share our passion for law in the service of human needs. We unveiled Public Square Live this fall by launching a series of public programs that explore the intersection of law and social justice. We inaugurated the series with a celebration of the new book *Dressing Constitutionally*, by our own Ruthann Robson, who was recently named one of the 26 best law teachers in the country in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, by Michael Hunter Schwartz, Gerald F. Hess, and Sophie M. Sparrow.

The moniker Public Square resonates powerfully with our values. We are a public law school, committed to graduating students who practice public interest law and engage in public service. The name plays off our location at Court Square in the heart of Long Island City (called “LIC” by many locals). But perhaps more importantly, the proverbial public square represents the heart of a community—a space for the exchange of ideas, where we open our doors to the broader community to debate the issues of the day.

This place matters. But it’s more than our physical address.

Over the past 30 years, CUNY Law has achieved a special place in the pursuit of social justice here in New York City and internationally. It has made an impact in the world that I’m not sure even the founders could have anticipated.

This first issue of *Public Square* highlights the recent work of our faculty, students, and alumni, those individuals behind the extraordinary impact we’re having. Faculty and students are making a difference in people’s lives, from the American Muslim community here in New York City to displaced women in Haiti. The role our graduates play throughout New York’s HIV/AIDS community is impressive. But it’s all just the tip of the iceberg.

So welcome to Public Square. Come in and join the conversation.

—Michelle J. Anderson
Dean and Professor of Law
This fall’s newest group of LaunchPad for Justice fellows are already beginning to leave their mark in New York’s housing court. One team of fellows negotiated a stipulation with a significant abatement for needed repairs, and the eviction case was discontinued. Another team of fellows was able to get $16,000 of back rent waived for a tenant. Although that tenant will have to vacate, he will not be saddled with that crushing debt.

LaunchPad fellows have been securing rights for tenants in New York’s housing courts since 2009. The LaunchPad program is an initiative of the Community Legal Resource Network (CLRN) at CUNY Law that enables recent graduates to represent clients before being admitted to the New York State Bar.

When the program first launched, the Hon. Fern Fisher, deputy chief administrative judge and director of the New York State Court’s Access to Justice Program, spoke about the fellows and said that CUNY Law’s “intensive clinical program has primed them to work with litigants to quickly grasp the skills they need to be effective in court.” She added that “their efforts will go far in helping those without access to legal education.”

The program is run in collaboration with Judge Fisher and is made possible by generous grants from the New York Community Trust and the New York State Judiciary Civil Legal Service Fund.
Live in the Public Square

This fall CUNY Law launched Public Square Live, a new series of public programs that explore the intersection of law and social justice. The series kicked off with a celebration of Distinguished Professor Ruthann Robson’s new book, *Dressing Constitutionally: Hierarchy, Sexuality, and Democracy from Our Hairstyles to Our Shoes*.

Public Square Live continued with the panel discussion “Marriage Equality on the Cutting Edge,” which was topical in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s recent rulings. Professor Richard Storrow hosted an engaging conversation with Mariko Hirose of the New York Civil Liberties Union and Elizabeth Cukor of the New York Legal Assistance Group.

Five additional programs are planned this academic year. Watch our website, e-mails, and social media postings for announcements.

Bratspies Awarded National Fellowship

Professor Rebecca Bratspies has been named an Audubon and Toyota TogetherGreen Fellow for 2013–2014. As a fellow, she will receive a $10,000 grant to help support an innovative community-based conservation project and an opportunity to network with other committed leaders. Bratspies will use the grant to develop the Youth Alliance for Energy Justice and Conservation. Using *Mayah’s Lot*, Bratspies’s well-regarded environmental justice comic book, the project will bring together New York City youth to participate in hands-on research, exchange, and advocacy to promote energy justice as a strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

“I am honored to receive the fellowship and hope it will allow us to focus on introducing new and underrepresented individuals and communities to energy justice and to help them become effective advocates for energy justice in their own communities,” said Bratspies.

Bratspies is the founder and director of the school’s Center for Urban Environmental Reform (CUER), which promotes environmental democracy as a critical aspect of social justice. The center seeks to expand participation in public decision making and to increase transparency and overall access to information to enhance both the legitimacy of environmental decision-making processes and the fairness of decisions reached.

“What I wanted to do was to create a center for thinking in a holistic way about what it means to try to regulate the urban environment, what interests we are trying to promote, and who needs to be involved in the process,” Bratspies said in 2012 about the center’s founding.

Learn more about CUER at http://cuer.law.cuny.edu.
Nermeen Arastu has joined CUNY Law’s Immigrant & Non-Citizen Rights Clinic (INRC) as a clinical law professor and supervising attorney. Arastu’s practice areas include immigration law, civil rights matters, and commercial litigation. Along with Diala Shamas, Arastu is a principal author of Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and Its Impact on American Muslims, a report produced by CUNY Law’s Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CLEAR) project. Prior to joining CUNY, Arastu was a litigation associate at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, LLP, and a staff attorney at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Ann Cammett (’00) joined the faculty this fall and leads the third-year Family Law Concentration. Her scholarship explores intersectional legal issues of race, gender, poverty, mass criminalization, and the family, and she is a recognized expert on the policy implications of incarcerated parents with child support arrears and other collateral consequences of criminal convictions. Her work in this area has been cited in two amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of Turner v. Rogers and excerpted for family law casebooks and other treatises. Cammett joined CUNY Law from the William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Sofia Yakren joined the faculty this fall as an associate professor and teaches lawyering, torts, and disability law. Prior to joining CUNY Law, she was on the faculty at American University Washington College of Law, teaching disability law, mental disability law, and the Women and the Law Clinic, where her students represented clients facing a broad range of civil issues related to family law, public benefits, special education, and immigration. In her courses, Yakren emphasizes reflection, engaged client-centeredness, rigorous legal analysis, the reality and value of emotions in lawyering, and self-awareness/actualization.

Of note: Joseph Rosenberg (’86) was appointed senior associate dean for clinical programs. Glenn Kaufhold was named senior associate dean for institutional advancement. Cheryl Howard was appointed associate dean for student affairs. Allie Robbins (’09) has been appointed assistant dean for academic affairs. Helena Quon has been named assistant dean for admissions. C.J. Ortuno joined the Law School as executive director of development.

The latest news on faculty, students, and alumni can be found on our website at www.law.cuny.edu.
Giving Thanks

President Calvin Coolidge believed that “no person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave.”

The CUNY Law family had the opportunity recently to publicly honor a number of loyal donors by naming spaces within its home at 2 Court Square in recognition of philanthropy that is furthering the Law School’s mission. Those spaces include the Hamill Family Classroom, the Gregory and Diana Koster Circulation Desk, and the Dave Fields Auditorium.

The extended Hamill family joined in the celebration.

Diana and Gregory Koster celebrated the dedication of the Koster Circulation Desk in the law library with Dean Michelle Anderson and longtime staff members Chris Argiropoulos, Janet Oshinaya, and Steve Katz.

Philip Berry, vice chair of the CUNY Board of Trustees, left, and CUNY Senior Vice Chancellor Jay Hershenson, right, joined Dean Michelle Anderson and CUNY Senior University Dean Dave Fields for the unveiling of the Dave Fields Auditorium.
Terri Nilliasca (‘11) was honored with the Legal Aid Society’s 2013 Pro Bono Publico Award, which recognizes individuals who have provided exceptional legal services to low-income New Yorkers. Nilliasca volunteers with Damayan, a grassroots organization in New York City and Jersey City for Filipino immigrant workers and led by Filipino women domestic workers. She worked closely with Legal Aid attorneys representing members of Damayan in severe labor trafficking cases.

In one case, they helped a Filipino woman who had been working as a nanny in the United States for seven years. During that time, the woman labored 14-hour days for a family in New York, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. Without a bed of her own, she was forced to sleep on the floor next to the children. She earned $300/month, most of which she sent to her four children in the Philippines.

When she ultimately found her way to Damayan, Nilliasca, along with Legal Aid lawyers, helped her file for a T-visa, which allows victims of human trafficking to remain in the United States with authorization to work. After nearly a year and a half, the client finally received approval. She is now working as a nanny in a better situation and receives a fair wage. She also serves on the board of Damayan and speaks publicly about her experience to help other workers in similar situations.

Somalia Samuel (‘14) was selected as a Thurgood Marshall Fellow at the New York City Bar Association. As part of her fellowship, Samuel will conduct research and policy analysis for the New York City Bar’s Committee on Civil Rights and will be working with the City Bar Justice Center on immigration issues. The fellowship is designed to honor the legacy of Justice Thurgood Marshall by providing internship experience in public service or civil rights to talented minority law students.

Samuel is currently a student defender within the Criminal Defense Clinic at CUNY Law, where she represents indigent clients charged with misdemeanors in Queens Criminal Court. “I want to provide people in poor communities, like mine, with representation that is fair and effective, and that treats them with dignity,” she said.

David F. Everett was elected county court judge in Westchester County, New York. He won his election with a decisive 58 percent of the vote.

Everett comes to the bench with extensive criminal trial court experience. He was an assistant district attorney for more than 12 years in Queens and Brooklyn before launching his own civil trial and criminal defense law practice in New York more than 15 years ago.

He is a retired colonel, United States Army Reserve, with combat zone deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. When speaking last year about his inspiration to become a lawyer, Everett said, “I wanted to be part of an endeavor where I could really make a difference in helping to ensure that justice was done.”
Nationwide, law school applications are down almost 40 percent since 2010, according to the Law School Admission Council, in part because of the criticism of law schools. There have been two main criticisms of how most law schools operate today: 1) They fail to prepare students for the practice of law; and 2) They are too expensive, and students often graduate with debt they cannot repay, especially since many traditional opportunities for employment are drying up.

As a result, for students who dream of work in big corporate firms, law schools have become less attractive. “Students are doing the math,” said CUNY Law Dean Michelle Anderson, in a recent article in the *New York Times*. “Most law schools are too expensive, the debt coming out is too high, and the prospect of attaining a six-figure-income job is limited.”

CUNY Law and CUNY Law students are different, however. CUNY Law, from its founding, has made experiential training the centerpiece of its program, which makes its students exceptionally practice-ready when they graduate. “Students have come to study at CUNY because we have one of the best clinical programs in the country,” said Anderson. “CUNY Law is consistently ranked in the top 10 in the nation for clinics. What’s more, with one of the lowest tuition rates in the country, we ensure that our students receive an excellent legal education without incurring crushing debt.”

Moreover, although the traditional legal market is contracting, the need for committed public interest attorneys could not be higher. The financial crisis has left many low-income people destitute, and many in the middle class have slipped into poverty.

Anderson said, “The nature of the profession is changing. But unmet legal needs in poor and moderate-income communities are growing.”

Many CUNY Law graduates go on to work in solo and small, community-based practices and for nonprofit organizations such as the Legal Aid Society.

In response to declining law school applications, CUNY Law has refocused its messages to prospective students to ensure they know the extraordinary value of a CUNY Law education and the broader need for public interest attorneys. This fall, the school launched a dynamic new admissions outreach campaign that draws upon the passion that motivates students to apply to CUNY Law.

Messages such as “Right Wrongs,” “Passionate about Community,” and “The Law Is Our Weapon to Fight for Social Justice” fuel the new campaign. With new print materials, websites targeted to prospective and admitted students, Facebook groups, and other tools, CUNY Law is working to help prospective students understand how very different CUNY is.

Alumni are taking a role in this new “Right Wrongs” campaign. “Our graduates are our best ambassadors,” said Assistant Dean for Admissions Helena Quon. “Alumni know the unique value of a CUNY Law education in a way that no one else does, and prospective students greatly value alumni perspectives.”

Alumni interested in helping us recruit strong public interest advocates can receive a free “Alumni Ambassador Activation Kit” with posters, buttons, stickers, wristbands, and a checklist of easy ways to become involved.

“These are fun tools that can help word-of-mouth referrals, which is how we often find exceptional students,” said Quon.

To learn more and to receive an Alumni Ambassador Activation Kit, e-mail alumnioffice@law.cuny.edu or call 718.340.4210.

**NEW APPROACHES TO STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

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*Image of CUNY Law promotional materials*
Accolades for Teaching
When the authors of *What the Best Law Teachers Do* (Harvard University Press, 2013) selected CUNY School of Law’s own Distinguished Professor Ruthann Robson for inclusion in their new book, they had to do their homework.

They read her course materials; sat in on her classes; and quizzed colleagues, students, and alumni to evaluate why Robson—who has taught in areas including constitutional law, sexuality and law, and criminal procedure since 1990—should be considered one of the best law teachers in the nation.

“That was very nerve-racking,” says Robson, as she thinks about the research the book’s authors had to do on her. She’s seated at her office desk in a vibrant, red, floral-print shirt, her bright pink laptop at the ready. Then her blue-gray eyes shine, and her expression changes.

“I am thrilled to be in the book and to highlight CUNY Law School,” she says, smiling broadly.

Robson and CUNY Law are in extraordinary company. In all, the book’s authors included just 26 law professors, screened for having made a lasting, significant, and personal transformative impact on students, and for stimulating their thinking about life and legal practice and, more broadly, law and justice.

“She is a firm believer in access to justice, in promoting fundamental constitutional rights, and that law is really about commitment to serving the underserved,” says University of New Hampshire School of Law Professor Sophie Sparrow, one of the book’s three authors. “Professor Robson really influences her students in a significant way. She’s incredibly and profoundly thoughtful about teaching and ways to make it better.”

Robson’s meticulous preparation for her classes includes reading course materials three times, but each time with a different mental filter. The first time she reads it as a student to be connected with a first-time experience. Then she reads it as a professor to determine big-picture context, including relevance to testing. Last, she reads it as a litigator, so she can share with students how materials would be used in the real world after graduation, in court or policy work.

Robson also credits her success in the classroom to a close working relationship with CUNY Law’s Professional Skills Center. Center staff and professors teach skills, and they work with—and in—doctrinal classes in an integrated approach to learning law. By contrast, other law schools often cover skills in a separate course with upper-class students as teaching fellows.

“We pioneered this. We teach the academic and legal reasoning skills that the students need to succeed in the context of the doctrine they’re learning,” says David Nadvorney (’86), CUNY Law’s director of academic support programs. “I sit in on Professor Robson’s Constitutional Law class. That way I don’t have to guess what’s going on in class; I see what’s going on. I can see the interactions, and I can comment on them.”

For a skills professor to be connected to any given course makes a big difference in the level of training a student can receive.

CUNY Law also has an extensive network for career counseling and mentoring. That is great for students and alumni, and it also enriches the classroom experience, says Robson.

Consider her former student Jonathan Libby (’96), who had to present what now is known as the “Stolen Valor” case before the U.S. Supreme Court last year. To prepare, Libby sought out Robson, who, in turn, set up a moot court at CUNY to help. (See page 3 of the Fall 2012 *CUNY Law* magazine.)

Students in Robson’s First Amendment class played the role of Supreme Court justices to help Libby hone his brief and oral argument.

“When I have speakers in class, they’re pretty much always alumni. They are doing inspiring things, and then students can have this connection. They see someone who has graduated from the same school, and they say, ‘you know, I could do that.’”

“CUNY is different than other law schools because that’s really our culture,” Robson says. “Good teaching, thinking about and valuing teaching, and talking about it qualitatively doesn’t happen across the board at other schools.”

Co-author Sophie Sparrow concurs. “Anecdotally, from our interactions with CUNY faculty, [we can see that] Professor Robson is right,” says Sparrow. “We didn’t study faculties as a whole. Throughout all U.S. law schools, there are more people who embody important fundamental and transformative ways of teaching law.”

“Law is very dynamic. No matter what you teach, there’s always something new, some new twist,” says Robson. “That’s what I love about teaching law.”

—Paul Lin
CUNY Law is a place like no other. It was founded 30 years ago with a bold mandate: to provide a legal education to solve real-world problems, or, as we have come to think of it, Law in the Service of Human Needs.

An unwavering commitment to social justice continues to infuse all that we do. In this premier issue of Public Square, we highlight some of the stories of our students, faculty, and alumni and the positive impact they are having on people and communities around the world.

Whether protecting women in Haiti from sexual violence or addressing the legal needs of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian individuals here in New York who are affected by national security and counterterrorism policies and practices, members of the CUNY Law community are at the forefront of social justice.

We will continue to share our story in future issues of Public Square and on our website. We invite you to share your story with us through e-mail at alumnioffice@law.cuny.edu or on LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook.
“CUNY Law alumni are making a difference in every single HIV/AIDS organization in New York,” declared Jeffrey Brooks ('04), during a recent phone call with the Law School’s alumni office.

It was an intriguing statement. A little investigation revealed 15—and counting—CUNY Law graduates who are advocating, working, providing direct legal services, or making an impact in the HIV/AIDS community throughout New York City. We have interviewed all 15 for a daily web series that started on Sunday, December 1, World AIDS Day.

A subset joined us for a photo op and tour at 2 Court Square. They are, clockwise from top left, Jeffrey Brooks ('04) most recently with Gay Men’s Health Crisis, Jess Reed ('07) with BOOM!Health, Odella Woodson ('03) with AIDS Center of Queens County, Randy Petsche ('89) most recently from Bronx AIDS Services (now BOOM!Health), Mark Hess ('12) with the HIV Law Project, Sina Choi ('08) with Housing Works, Christa Douaihy ('08) with the Bronx Defenders, Pavita Krishnaswamy ('02) with South Brooklyn Legal Services, and Ed Campanelli ('03) with Housing Works.

Read the engaging profiles and enjoy a short, behind-the-scenes video of the photo shoot on the Law School’s
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Read the engaging profiles and enjoy a short, behind-the-scenes video of the photo shoot on the Law School’s home page at www.law.cuny.edu or on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/cunylawschool.
Imagine you’re about to walk out of your home to head to work. But as you open the door, you see someone waiting for you who claims to be a law enforcement agent. He says he just wants to ask some questions about your background, the mosque you attend, and your views about current world events.

Do you comply?
“You are not under any legal obligation to answer any question, period,” advised Professor Ramzi Kassem, a supervising attorney with CUNY Law’s Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility project, known as CLEAR. “In that situation, it is everyone’s right in our country to politely, but firmly, refuse to answer questions without the benefit of counsel.”

This kind of essential advice is what Muslim, Arab, or South Asian workshop attendees—anyone from New York City neighborhoods under post-9/11 surveillance by law enforcement agents—can gain from CLEAR, which brings know-your-rights workshops straight into affected communities.

CLEAR is a cross-clinical project between the Immigrant & Non-Citizen Rights Clinic (INRC) that Kassem directs and Professor Steve Zeidman’s Criminal Defense Clinic. It aims to help those targeted by intelligence operations live their day-to-day lives.

“Our work lies at the intersection of so-called ‘security’ law, immigration, and criminal law,” said Kassem, who helped found the project with a group of students in 2009. “We draw on skills and expertise from students in those two clinics.”

CLEAR seeks to raise awareness while providing pro bono legal representation and counseling to clients. To tackle underlying issues, the project added an advocacy focus, pushing for policy changes, whether within the New York City Council, the U.S. Department of Justice, or another body. The aim is to bring more accountability to law enforcement agencies operating in New York City.

In CLEAR know-your-rights workshops, individuals learn how to respond to unprovoked questioning by playing out scenarios enacted by CLEAR students, attorneys, and volunteers drawn from the communities where the sessions take place.

“When you have agents or detectives with the New York City Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the Department of Homeland Security asking questions that have nothing to do with an actual investigation,” Kassem said, “we think of it as an intelligence fishing expedition to find out about a community.”

It’s something that’s been going on since the 9/11 attacks, and is still quite common, as CLEAR has documented in New York City neighborhoods where surveillance occurs.

“At our know-your-rights workshops, we often ask...how many people have been or know someone who has been approached by law enforcement for questioning. In some mosques, every hand in the room will go up,” said Diala Shamas, a staff attorney with CLEAR. Law enforcement wants to “find out more about community, religious practices, political beliefs, where people go to pray, what imams are saying in mosques,” she said.

This past spring, Shamas coauthored a report with CUNY Law Clinical Professor Nermeen Arastu titled “Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and its Impact on American Muslims”

The “Mapping Muslims” report documents the effects of the New York Police Department’s (NYPD) extensive surveillance program that targeted American Muslims throughout the Northeast. It is based on in-depth interviews and presents an unprecedented collection of voices of affected community members.

The report details how the NYPD’s extensive spying program creates a pervasive climate of fear and suspicion that encroaches upon every aspect of American Muslims’ lives and severs the essential relationship of trust that should exist between law enforcement agencies and the communities they are charged with protecting.

The interviews indicate that fear of surveillance has resulted in a decline in participation in religious activities, community and social activities, and Muslim student organizations. The findings document, among other things:

- Impacts on students on college campuses, including silencing their activism, alienating their student groups, and affecting their academic choices
- Suppression of religious spaces, as mosque congregants become suspicious of one another, imams hesitate when advising their congregants, and individuals refrain from appearing overtly “Muslim” to avoid triggering surveillance
- Silencing of speech and political activism—whether engagement in public debates and protests or friendly coffeehouse banter
- Damaging the NYPD’s own relationship with American Muslims in New York City, breaching communities’ much-needed relationship of trust with those who are tasked with protecting them.

Read more and download the full report at www.law.cuny.edu/clear.
The report, published by CLEAR and an allied nonprofit, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, on behalf of the Muslim American Civil Liberties Coalition, captured the voices of law-abiding people targeted by the NYPD's extensive surveillance program. The report found that the NYPD has spied on American Muslims throughout the Northeast at neighborhood cafes and places of worship, and even infiltrated a student whitewater-rafting trip.

The NYPD's activities first came to light through a series of Pulitzer Prize–winning articles that the Associated Press began publishing in 2011.

Such sweeping surveillance has affected many different communities, stifling speech, communal life, and religious practice, according to report coauthor Arastu, a supervising attorney with CLEAR and in the INRC.

“The NYPD specifically targeted those individuals who fell within one of their 28 'ancestries of interest,'” said Arastu. “Nearly all of these specified ‘ancestries’ were nations with majority-Muslim or large Muslim populations, including Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, and former Soviet states. ‘American Black Muslims’ were also singled out on this list.

“The surveillance of those with Muslim ‘ancestries’ spanned various professions, included many colleges and universities, and went beyond the state borders,” she said. “The focus has been on any who identify as Muslim or appear to be from a Muslim-majority country, including natural-born U.S. citizens.”

It was against this backdrop that CLEAR and its partners, the American Civil Liberties Union and the New York Civil Liberties Union, filed a lawsuit in June of 2013 against the City of New York, challenging the NYPD’s surveillance of innocent Muslim New Yorkers. The plaintiffs in Raza v. City of New York include the religious leader Hamid Hassan Raza, as well as two other religious and community leaders, two mosques, and one charitable organization. All the plaintiffs “have been subject to the NYPD’s unconstitutional religious profiling program,” according to the suit.

It’s impressive to see CLEAR’s progress and observe how Kassem’s team of supervisory attorneys has come together in the four years since the project began. At the beginning, Kassem had just started at CUNY Law, after finishing two years teaching at Yale Law School.

He knew Shamas as a law student, as they worked together on a case he supervised at Yale. Shamas worked with the National Litigation Project, litigating cases stemming from post-9/11 detention policies. When she graduated from Yale, she joined CLEAR with the support of an Arthur Liman Public Interest Fellowship.

Arastu had collaborated as co-counsel with Kassem on a matter in immigration court before joining CUNY Law’s faculty this summer. She had been a staff attorney at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, where she led the Immigrant Rights Program and Post-9/11 Civil Liberties Project.

At the time Arastu was contemplating working at CUNY Law, she was working at a corporate law firm.

“CLEAR’s reputation is excellent in nonprofit and pro bono communities,” she said. “This reputation, alongside the opportunity to teach students who are passionate about social justice, drew me to the CUNY School of Law.”

Being a part of CUNY School of Law helps CLEAR’s ability to serve the communities it works with.

“It helps us gain people’s trust, making people more willing to share their stories with us,” Shamas said. “Having the project based in a law school lends credibility to what we are doing.”

CLEAR fits well at the law school, Kassem believes, because it draws on the passion and energy of CUNY Law students who are firmly committed to social justice. The project also raises the school’s profile in the communities that CLEAR serves, potentially furthering the other part of the law school’s mission—increasing access to the legal profession.

“One of our hopes is that in the near future an increasing number of students from the various communities that CLEAR serves will choose to attend law school here at CUNY,” said Kassem. “There’s no other place where a project like CLEAR could exist, thrive, and contribute meaningfully to the welfare of city residents but at CUNY Law, the only public law school in our city.”

—Paul Lin
Strengthening Women’s Rights In Haiti

Catching up with globe-trotting CUNY Law Professor Lisa Davis ('08) can be a challenge, especially when she’s tracking the progress of long-term projects taken on by the International Women’s Human Rights Clinic (IWHR) and her students.

Geneva and Beirut were on her recent travel itinerary, as was Port-au-Prince, where the clinic has for years had a measurable impact on women’s lives. After the devastating 2010 earthquake, IWHR used international mechanisms to get Haiti to improve lighting and security in earthquake displacement camps to help protect women from sexual violence. Since 2010, IWHR has partnered with grassroots women’s and, more recently, LGBT groups to leverage international pressure to promote other legal and policy reforms that address the discrimination and violence faced by these communities.
“I’m traveling with our IWHR Haiti team. The students will interview survivors of violence, engage with U.N. agencies, and conduct know-your-rights trainings for LGBT and women’s grassroots organizations on enforcing international human rights standards in Haiti,” Davis relayed in an e-mail.

IWHR’s work in Haiti expanded after this summer’s outbreak of violent protests in Port-au-Prince against LGBT Haitians. Students conducted fact-finding investigations into the violence. In addition, they investigated whether IWHR can litigate regionally against the government after attempts on the life of a women’s human rights defender.

The students’ latest trip also taught local groups about the current provisions strengthening women’s rights in a draft law that would modernize Haiti’s penal code. Born from IWHR litigation and petitioning of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2010, the draft law aims to enhance protections and improve access to justice.

“What’s really incredible about this project is the extent to which it’s been responsive to the needs of communities in Haiti,” said IWHR Director Cynthia Soohoo. “We have long-term partners [there], and our work has been driven by their goals. That has enabled us to ensure that reforms we seek actually reflect the priorities of grassroots groups.”

At this writing, the draft law criminalizing violence against women was anticipated to come to a vote before Haiti’s Parliament. The Ministry of Justice, at IWHR and partners’ request, had already approved the inclusion of provisions criminalizing marital rape in its penal code revision.

Parliament’s passage of the draft law would help Haiti meet international standards for protecting women and address gender-based human rights violations. Once passed, the law would make marital rape and sexual harassment crimes; legalize therapeutic abortion in the first trimester, if the woman’s health is at risk; and help protect Haiti’s LGBT community from discrimination.

“If approved, it would be a landmark in legislation addressing gender-based violence in Haiti by implementing the long-term recommendations of the Inter-American Commission and ultimately change the lives of countless women in Haiti,” said Davis. Achieving such results in international forums has put the spotlight on IWHR since its founding by the late Rhonda Copelon in the 1990s, attracting students to CUNY Law who seek to protect and support women’s human rights.

“I said to myself: ‘I have to go to that school because of that clinic,’” Nermina Zecirovic-Arnaud (’13) remembered, after once hearing Copelon deliver a presentation. By the time Zecirovic-Arnaud got to CUNY Law, the clinic was in the hands of Davis and Soohoo.

“Lisa and Cindy are phenomenal. They continue [Rhonda Copelon’s] legacy really well,” said Zecirovic-Arnaud, who traveled twice to Haiti during her time at the law school, conducting fact-finding investigations on human rights violations committed against victims of sexual violence and LGBT discrimination. As one of three students on the Haiti team, she learned how to write U.N. legal submissions and conduct legal investigations with cultural sensitivity.

“It was an incredible experience to talk to grassroots organizations and women survivors” of sexual and gender-based violence, she said, “and to learn how resilient they are, despite their
circumstances and living conditions. All the abuses they face, and they are still advocating for themselves and not giving up.”

What students learn in the clinic they take well beyond the walls of CUNY Law. This experience not only helps them gain employment; it also better prepares them for their future careers.

“We have alums working in all sorts of human rights fields, from litigating to trafficking cases to documenting LGBT human rights violations worldwide,” said Davis. “Our grads tell me that the work they did in IWHR made them feel better prepared to engage in interviewing, documenting, preparing prima facie cases, and so much more.”

Natasha Bannan (’11) recently applied what she learned from IWHR about international forums and human rights treaties to bring a petition to IACHR charging the United States with 70 years of human rights violations on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, stemming from the U.S. use of the island for bombing practice and biochemical warfare testing. Her petition, brought on behalf of the island’s residents, picked up international media attention from outlets as diverse as ABC News, the Huffington Post, and Puerto Rico’s El Nuevo Dia.

“The U.S. military refused to acknowledge any connection to the subsequent health and environmental hazards and the harsh consequences [to island residents], including disproportionately high rates of cancer, hypertension, kidney failure, respiratory illnesses, and skin conditions. [The U.S. did] serious harm to the environment as well: the land, the surrounding water, and the air. There’s been no redress for seven decades,” said Bannan, who cochairs the international committee for the National Lawyers Guild. She also is a legal fellow at the Center for Reproductive Rights.

Working on cases such as Vieques is something Bannan sees herself doing in future years.

“It’s why I went to CUNY Law School. To do this kind of work... on behalf of a community that I am a part of to try to seek justice. To me, it’s what it means to be a lawyer.”

—Natasha Bannan (’11)

Decktor, now a legal fellow and program officer of document and advocacy at the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), learned from IWHR what she does today in her job at IGLHRC: working with other human rights organizations and activists, writing U.N. legal submissions, documenting human rights violations.

Traveling for the first time to Haiti this fall as a CUNY graduate, Decktor trained human rights defenders and grassroots groups on how to do the same kind of human rights documentation work IWHR has done over the years, and how to turn that documentation into a report to submit to the United Nations. Such reports keep governments in check when they have not fulfilled human rights agreements under treaties.

Decktor said that one of the best things that came from her experience with IWHR was traveling abroad, meeting and working directly with the people who were fighting to help themselves.

“Two years ago when I was in the clinic as a student, I met in Geneva some of the [Haitian] activists from KOFAVIV [an organization established by and for rape survivors from Port-au-Prince] that we partnered with. They’re really wonderful, dynamic women,” said Decktor.

Visiting countries in conflict, and having direct access to the people who need help to succeed in their fight, is awe-inspiring and compassion-building for IWHR students.

“It’s one thing to learn about international human rights theoretically and to write these reports, but to truly see the impact on the ground is something different,” said Zecirovic-Arnaud. “I feel inspired and empowered to be able to help people and learn from them. It feels incredible.”

When students relay how much IWHR has helped them prepare for the world outside law school, it makes all the difference to Lisa Davis.

“It’s those notes that reaffirm my commitment to the work of IWHR, and it’s why I look forward to teaching at CUNY Law each day—knowing it makes a difference,” she said.

At the same time, IWHR takes CUNY Law’s stated mission of “law in the service of human needs” to an international level.

“We’re working with communities that are most affected and trying to figure out how to use and change laws to ensure that their fundamental rights are respected,” stated Soohoo. —Paul Lin
1986


Barbara Henry Trapasso was elected president of the Garden City Union Free District School Board on July 1, 2013.

1989

New York City Criminal Court Judge Toko Serita currently presides over the Queens Misdemeanor Drug Treatment Court, Mental Health Court, and Human Trafficking Intervention Court. A leading judicial expert on human trafficking, Judge Serita wrote “In Our Own Backyards: The Need for a Coordinated Judicial Response to Human Trafficking,” which was published in the *New York University Review of Law and Social Change*.

1991

Eduardo Capulong was awarded tenure and promoted to full professor at the University of Montana School of Law.

1992

Geraldine Ramos Bjallerstedt has relocated to Stockholm, Sweden.

Marc Reitman works for the Social Security Administration in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Marianna Henry Saylor has been certified as a specialist in the practice of workers’ compensation law by the Pennsylvania Bar Association Workers’ Compensation Law Section. She is a partner in the workers’ compensation department of Willig, Williams & Davidson, one of the largest union-side labor law firms in the United States.

1993

Bill Tsoumpelis represents distressed homeowners in foreclosure actions and clients in real estate–based litigation through the Law Office of Bill Tsoumpelis.

1994

Daniel Flanzig spoke at the American Association for Justice Annual Convention in San Francisco on bicycle litigation as an emerging area of practice. Daniel was also a panel member on one of the first national bike law webinars sponsored by the organization.

1995

Charlie Casolaro argued a motion for leave to appeal before three judges of the New York State Court of Appeals. It was an election law case, representing a candidate for the Democratic primary for the Nassau County Legislature.

Kim Dvorchak, executive director of the Colorado Juvenile Defender Coalition, was appointed to the Colorado Interim Legislative Committee to Study Juvenile Defense. The committee is considering proposals to ensure the right to counsel for indigent youth in juvenile delinquency court and improve the quality of juvenile defense representation for the 2014 legislative session.

Devika Kewalramani, a partner at Moses and Singer LLP, was appointed chair of the Professional Discipline Committee of the New York City Bar Association.

1996

Tracy Bing has been appointed a civil court judge sitting in Bronx Family Court. Her docket will be custody, guardianship, visitation, and orders of protection matters, along with objections to child support orders.

Justin Frankel, a partner at the disability insurance law firm Frankel & Newfield, has been named by *Super Lawyers* magazine as one of the top New York Metro area lawyers for 2013. This is the second time Frankel has been selected as a Super Lawyer.
1997

Lori Citron Knipel was named a Star of Brooklyn by Home Reporter News and the Brooklyn Spectator.

1999

Latino Lawyers Association of Queens County President Mercedes S. Cano expanded her practice with the addition of an office on Park Avenue in Manhattan. Mercedes continues working with immigrants and their families, with a particular focus on family petitions for same-sex couples, after the Supreme Court decision in U.S. v. Windsor. Mercedes can be seen on her biweekly program on Channel 47 Telemundo Noticias, Pregunte Sin Miedo, during which she analyzes immigration issues and answers viewer questions. For more information, visit www.mercedescano.com.

2000

Diego Demaya is a human resources educator and director of ADA Technical Assistance with the Southwest ADA Center covering Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Arkansas. Diego recently completed a yearlong project providing training to the entire Houston Police Department on the liability of law enforcement under the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as on disability etiquette. In May 2013 he presented two workshops at the National ADA Symposium, on the ADA and vocational rehabilitation and on issues of concern for employers under the ADA Amendments Act of 2008.


2001

Colleen Marie Richman is a staff attorney with the New York City Administration for Children’s Services division of Family Court Legal Services. She is also a board member of the Civil Service Bar Association.

2002

Ignacio Jaureguiordoa is the legal director at the AIDS Center of Queens County, litigating issues affecting people living with HIV/AIDS such as homelessness, benefits, and transgender and disability discrimination. He was formerly a staff attorney at Housing Works, Inc., litigating civil rights cases and working on disability, landlord/tenant matters, and other issues affecting poor people living with HIV/AIDS.

2003

After more than five years as the executive director of the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs at New York City’s Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services, Kavita Pawria-Sanchez is now general counsel at the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs.

2004

Katherine (Doyle) Mastaitis is now a supervising litigation attorney at Donnellan, Knussman & Kraigenow, PLLC, a firm devoted to family and matrimonial law. Her husband, Benjamin Mastaitis, continues working at the Albany District Attorney’s Office in the Major Offense Bureau. Ben also teaches Albany fifth graders about the legal system as part of the Legal Lives program. Ben has completed his 29th Adirondack high peak, getting closer to his goal of completing all 46 high peaks. Kate and Ben live near Albany with their two daughters.

Mariana Toledo-Hermina has been working at Rawls, Scheer, Foster, Mingo & Culp, PLLC in Charlotte, NC, since December 2012 as an associate attorney practicing immigration law.

2006

Richard M. Goldman continues to represent the injured and disabled at the Workers’ Compensation Board and Social Security Administration in New York’s capital region. He is the treasurer of the Injured Workers’ Bar Association and the chair of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Memorial Scholarship Committee, which provides financial assistance for higher education to children of those injured or killed at work.
Cynthia Thompson has been employed by the Legal Aid Society, Bronx Criminal Defense Practice, since graduating from CUNY Law.

2007

After more than five years of private practice, Daniel Baek joined the real estate title company Liberty Land Abstract, Inc. as its general counsel in March 2013. Daniel was recently appointed to the New York City Community Board 11, which cooperates with and advises elected and appointed government officials on the issues related to budget, public safety, consumer affairs, economic development, and zoning.

Carly (Meyer) Bisceglie has been a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society, Criminal Defense Practice in Manhattan, since graduating from CUNY Law. She and her husband, David Bisceglie, welcomed their beautiful daughter Violet into the world in June 2013.

Owen Daniel-McCarter became the legal director of the TransLife Center, a project of the Chicago House and Social Service Agency. The center is a comprehensive holistic “housing first” program that supports the lives of street-based transgender people in Chicago by providing hosting, employment training, legal services, medical support, and affirming case management to break cycles of incarceration and homelessness in trans communities.

Jennifer Frankola is a litigation associate for Lewis Jhos Avalone Aviles, LLP. She joined the firm in February 2010 and has since established the firm’s education and special needs practice. Her work includes representing families at impartial hearings and appeals against school districts to ensure that children receive an appropriate education. She also assists parents in identifying appropriate education plans and services from early intervention, preschool, school-aged, and postsecondary life. Recently selected as a 2013 Super Lawyers Rising Star, Jennifer married Jared Crawford in November 2012.

Emily White joined Disability Rights Ohio as a staff attorney focused on employment law. Previously she practiced consumer law at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

2008

Veda Collmer presented at the American Society of Law, Medicine & Ethics’ Health Law Professors Conference at Seton Hall in June. Her presentation analyzed the constitutionality of tobacco display bans, which may be a viable way to prevent youth from smoking, but violate the manufacturer’s commercial speech rights.

2009

Anthony Lise is practicing family law, with a focus on same-sex and nontraditional families, at Weiss, Buell & Bell in Manhattan. He is the chair of the Family & Matrimonial Law Committee of the LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York; he helped conceive and establish the committee. He and his partner of almost five years, Kevin, recently became engaged and are living in DUMBO, Brooklyn, with their dog, Henry.

2010

Jonathan Harris is an associate with the New York labor law firm Cohen, Weiss and Simon. Prior to joining the firm, he clerked for Judge James Graves of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and taught legal writing at Mississippi College School of Law in Jackson.

2012

Raymond Fernandez has accepted a two-year clerkship with New York Court of Appeals Judge Jenny Rivera. He was formerly a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Society’s Criminal Defense Practice.

Izel Fortunato has joined the Legal Aid Society’s Parole Revocation Defense Unit as a staff attorney.

Angela Torregoza has launched her Art for Social Justice website, www.whoisvenusinorbit.com, with an interview with freedom fighter Yusef Abdus Salaam. The site features photography, interviews, and articles that speak about social justice issues such as mass incarceration, sex trafficking, and indigenous rights. Angela also celebrated her first anniversary as executive director of Kinding Sindaw, a resident artistic group of the world-renowned La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club.
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<td>Amanda E. Jack ('11)</td>
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<td>Dinesh Khosla**</td>
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<td>Matthew J. Lamberti ('09)</td>
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<td>Robin E. Gordon Leafcitt ('12)</td>
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<td>Abbi Leman</td>
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<td>LexisNexis</td>
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<td>Julie Lim</td>
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<td>Rebecca A. Lindhurst ('99)</td>
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<td>Zoe J. London ('97)</td>
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<td>Shirley Lung</td>
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<td>Susan Markus</td>
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<td>William S. Massey ('04)</td>
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<td>Megan L. Miller ('02)</td>
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We have made every effort to ensure the completeness and accuracy of this list. Should you find an error or omission, please call the Office of Institutional Advancement at 718.340.4643.
There’s Work to Do

Moving through New York’s legal and social justice communities, we see the impact of CUNY School of Law everywhere. Students are interning in our city’s nonprofit organizations. Alumni are seeking justice as public defenders and judges. Others are improving the lives of average citizens who, all too often, are unrepresented in the legal system.

Within these pages, you’ve read about the vital work being done by faculty, students, and alumni in Haiti under the auspices of the International Women’s Human Rights Clinic. You’ve seen how the school is helping American Muslims protect their civil rights in an environment of unfair surveillance practices besieging their community. And you’ve gotten a glimpse of the profound impact our alumni are having in the HIV/AIDS community.

The work of CUNY Law and the extraordinary value of its alumni are in more demand than ever. Thirty years ago, who could have imagined the impact we would be making on the world?

CUNY Law is no longer a hidden treasure buried next to a cemetery in Flushing. Its new, state-of-the art facility in Long Island City is the talk of the legal community and beyond. It’s time to share more ubiquitously who and what we are and the impact that we have, with our neighbors, with our colleagues, and, most importantly, with the progressive philanthropic community.

We need to create partnerships and relationships that will sustain summer fellowships and innovative programs like the Pipeline to Justice, which enhances the diversity of the profession, and the LaunchPad for Justice, which provides access to justice for those who need it most.

I’m delighted with how many names appear on the donor honor roll in this issue of Public Square. But we can do so much better. There is more work to be done, and we have more lawyers to produce—committed individuals who will advocate for social justice and win!

—Rebecca Seawright (’92)

Rebecca Seawright is a graduate of the CUNY Law class of 1992 and is a member of the school’s board of visitors. She is the chair of the board of directors of the Feminist Press, an independent, nonprofit literary publisher that promotes freedom of expression and social justice.
The troubled economy has hit moderate- and low-income people the hardest. The financial and housing crises, compounded by cuts in government assistance, mean that the need for the legal skills that CUNY Law graduates have could not be greater.

The world needs more lawyers like you, and we need your help to find them. Become a CUNY Law Alumni Ambassador and help us find the next generation of attorneys committed to law in the service of human needs.

Sign up online at www.law.cuny.edu/ambassador, e-mail alumnioffice@law.cuny.edu, or call (718) 340-4210