



# The Journey

By Ann W. Parks



# Continues

The second year of law school is all about choices: exploring options, picking classes and clinics, finding jobs, deciding what to do with the rest of your life. Last year, *Georgetown Law* began a three-part series profiling four students as they began to build their legal careers. Now in their second year, these students have found their footing and are starting down the paths that seem right for them. In choosing classes, they've found an unaccustomed level of freedom; 2Ls may, for example, describe an elective as "a fun class" or a "guilty pleasure" — not because it is easy, but simply because the course excites their intellectual curiosity. On the following pages, you'll find our four 2Ls at the midpoint of their law school experience — talking about where they've been, where they are now and where they one day hope to be.

# NEAL FISHER

“I would never have guessed or imagined some years ago that I would be in the position that I am today.”

Two “couples” sit with their mediator across a table. Both are divorced after seven years of marriage. Both have a young daughter, age 5, and both are having trouble hammering out the details of their custody and visitation agreements.

One “mother” comments that every other weekend with her child sounds good to her. The other declares that she’d like half the summer with her daughter.

“Did you discuss that with your partner?” asks Neal Fisher (C’06, L’09), the 2L student who is overseeing the negotiations.

She hadn’t, so it’s back to the drawing board for that couple. The other pair, meanwhile, wants to change the age of their child. If she’s 15 or 16, they reason, instead of 5, she could take care of herself after school.

Fisher laughs, but he holds his ground. The child stays 5.

In his second year of law school, Fisher is participating in Georgetown Law’s D.C. Street Law Clinic — teaching high school students what he, himself, is still learning: the law.

At 2 p.m. on a Wednesday afternoon, the lesson of the day is alterna-

tive dispute resolution, and Fisher has already outlined some of the finer points of negotiation. The hypothetical problems he hands out are tough; designed by the clinic, the scenarios involve, among other things, a custody fight and an employment conflict between a doctor and her HIV-positive assistant.

Sometimes the conversations get heated, and Fisher must steer the negotiations back on track. Here, he’s no pinstripe-suited lawyer, lecturing juveniles about the finer points of the Constitution. Dressed casually in a blue shirt and jeans, he is able to communicate with students on their level.

“I like knowing where I’m going and leaving them in suspense,” Fisher says afterwards. “If you can do a good job and be convincing, you can get them to where you want them to go — but you can’t push them there, you can’t throw them there, they have to follow you.”

## Getting Students Talking

Last year, he says, everything about law school was new. This year, Fisher knows the drill. “You have an idea what you’re going to do, what’s

expected of you, what you need to look for in your reading, what you need to try to remember,” he notes. “Your first year, you’re reading, you’re paying attention to every single word on the paper ... now you know how to outline, how to prep.”

He knows, too, that he can take on more work. Besides the clinic, which involves maybe five hours of preparation time per week, he’s also clerking at Akin Gump. He’s a staff editor with the *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy* (five to eight hours a week), and yes, there are still classes. In the fall, he took Copyright, Refugee Law and Policy, Criminal Law and Procedure, and Professional Responsibility; in the spring, Local Government, Family Law, and the Theories of Criminal Responsibility Seminar.

In Street Law, Fisher makes it a point to get to know his students. What music do you listen to? A bunch of stuff? You have to give me some names. Tell me something interesting about yourself. He makes sure that the students learn a little bit about each other, too. He also makes sure that his students spend some time

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writing during class. It's not a requirement of the Street Law program, so why does he do it?

"A big criticism of high school students, D.C. schools in particular, is that their writing skills are not up to par," he says, noting that he was not made to write much when he was growing up on the eastern shore of Virginia. Even as a busy law student, Fisher says he always sets aside a little time to write, no matter how busy he gets. "If I don't write, I feel like I'm not able to just free myself," he says. And so now, in Street Law, he's passing that freedom on to his high school students. Give me 15 minutes, he tells them, and give me what you've got.

### Counselors and Mentors

Once a poor kid himself, Fisher managed to conquer high school, Georgetown University and now, nearly two-thirds of Georgetown Law School, he says, was the easy part; not knowing where his next meal was coming from and going to high school football practice with hunger pains — that was hard.

Those days are gone, yet they continue to shape the kind of person he is. He says he would like to work with impoverished people in his career, perhaps through the avenue of sports teams.

"I think that those young NBA players and NFL players who are very popular household names could have a very positive impact on a lot of

communities across the country, especially those that are plagued with poverty and destitution," he says. "I think that a lot of the kids from these areas think of sports as a way of getting out of their own misery ... so I'd like to work sort of in the middle, between those players and those impoverished people, and maybe just help out those communities, and uplift them, and let them see that there is some hope out there."

Attorneys, he's learned, are not simply lawyers — they are counselors and mentors as well. For example, his work on a Violence Against Women Act petition last summer meant that in addition to completing legal paperwork he also helped provide his client with information that she would otherwise not have had, "such as how to properly file for divorce and where to go to get proper things for her children to have for school," he says. "Lawyers' deeds go far beyond just the legal obligations that they have."

### Living the Dream

Has Fisher changed much since starting at Georgetown Law? Not

really; he says he's always approached school as if it were a job, and a job as if it meant putting food on the table. "I've always had that value ingrained in me not to take things for granted, and to strive and work for everything that I've wanted."

Nevertheless, Fisher says he now understands more about how the world operates. "I just have a better understanding of what's expected of me, what I have to do to perform well." He's returning to Akin Gump this summer, having been fortunate enough to choose from among "several wonderful offers."

Above all, Fisher is grateful. "I would never have guessed or imagined some years ago that I would be in the position that I am today; for me, my dream was to go to college," he says. "So I've been living that dream over and over for the last few years ... there are more opportunities opening up and more chances to do something else — all of this is just a bonus."

# REBEKAH SALAZAR

“Last year, especially the first semester, ... I was always on edge. ... This year I don’t have the same stress level.”

It’s Friday morning in Washington, D.C., and a group of Georgetown Law students — together with students from Loyola University in New Orleans — are making the 10-minute trek from the Law Center to the Cannon House Office Building in the rain.

The rain is an irony; not only is it the first time in months that Washington has seen a rainy day, but the weather is, indirectly, what the students are meeting with Rep. Charlie Melancon, D-La., to discuss. The seminar is called Government Accountability, and Melancon is meeting with the class to describe his efforts to boost recovery in Louisiana — two years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

One of the students is Rebekah Salazar, a 2L in the evening division who took time off from her job with the U.S. Border Patrol to attend the two-credit seminar that meets on two weekends only. A month earlier, Salazar and her classmates traveled to New Orleans.

“We all saw what was happening on television, read about it in the paper, and it was such a tragic event,” Salazar

says, explaining her decision to take this particular course. “I was picking classes and I saw that there was this opportunity to get involved ... the class is about the government’s role, to see what could have been done, what should have been done, what we can do in the future for other events that might happen. It just seemed like a really great learning experience.”

## Night and Day

The biggest change in Salazar since she began law school is that she’s more relaxed. “It’s like night and day,” she says. “I remember last year, especially the first semester, ... I was always on edge, I was waiting to see what was coming up next, trying to keep ahead of my reading, and studying, and I didn’t know what was coming, and I didn’t know what to expect with exams. ... It took me a lot longer when I’d get home at night to decompress and calm down to where I could go to sleep. This year I don’t have the same stress level.”

It’s no easy feat. She’s still working full time for the U.S. Border Patrol at its Washington, D.C., headquarters; still taking classes at

Georgetown Law in the four-year evening program; still living in Chantilly, Virginia, with a round-trip commute that takes up more than two hours of an already jam-packed day. And this year, she’s serving as president of Women in Federal Law Enforcement, a national nonprofit that seeks to recruit and retain women in the profession. So what accounts for the more relaxed attitude?

For one thing, she got a head start on the year by taking evening courses in Professional Responsibility and Decedent’s Estates over the summer. Although these courses made an already demanding first year even longer — she did not, of course, give up her day job — Salazar believes the strategy will pay off in the long run.

“I want to prepare as much as possible to have some options,” she says. “If I have a semester where I need to take fewer classes and not be behind, I want to give myself some space.” (She intends to do the same this summer, by the way.)

Also, by carefully scheduling her fall classes, she was able to give herself an unheard-of luxury: Friday evenings off. She doesn’t jump into next week’s

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assignments, but likes to read a newspaper or book for pleasure instead.

The main reason for her comfort level, though, is that she's simply become a pro at juggling her hectic schedule. Though time management is just as much of a challenge as it was in her first year of law school, having gone down the road once, she knows she can do it again.

"Because of the experience of the first year, I know that I can handle it because of what I handled before," she says. "I think I was nervous, I didn't quite know what to expect, everything was new, the way the law is taught was different, just getting used to this new environment. ... I now feel much better prepared."

### On-Site Education

As a student in the Government Accountability course, she even got to travel a little this semester. Though her work schedule caused her to miss her original flight to New Orleans last fall, she caught up with her classmates there just in time to participate in seminars and to tour areas in New Orleans flooded by Katrina.

"There's nothing there," Salazar says of the Lower Ninth Ward. "It looks like a park, the grass is overgrown so much, the vegetation is so thick that you don't even realize that there were houses there ... you see how massive the storm was."

In October, when the Loyola students came to Georgetown, she got to accompany them on a visit to



Melancon's office, to CNN's Situation Room set — and also to a meeting with Michael Brown, former Undersecretary of Emergency Preparedness and Response in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Besides participating in the Government Accountability course, Salazar took Tax Law (because she's interested in estate planning); International Law; and Copyright (because it allowed her to take her own self-proclaimed "guilty pleasure" course, Entertainment Law, in the spring). She's also taking Criminal Justice — the last of her required classes — and International Trafficking in Persons this spring.

One might assume that someone who has worked for the border patrol for 12 years might be a pro at international law, which Salazar says is not always the case. "With contracts, the cases dealt with people arguing over this [or that], and I could see what they were talking about; genocide, I don't have experience with that," she says. "It takes a lot more understanding."

Unlike most of her classmates, Salazar has already built a satisfying career and says she's just focused on finishing her degree at the moment. Though she won't predict what her future will hold — given the opportunities that may arise — she likes the idea of doing pro bono work. "Maybe homeless people, indigent people who need some type of legal work," she says.

Does she ever wish she could just be a law student full time?

"At times I wish I could just go to school and just concentrate on it, and participate in the clinics and a lot of things that I can't participate in because of my time constraints," she admits. "But there's also an advantage to being a part-time student. A lot of us are not right out of college, we have some experience, so a lot of the conversations that you have in class, you have that perspective of everybody's experiences. It would be nice to have all that time, but I like my life and I like my job, and with a lot of prayer and God's help I can make it work."

# RON CLUETT

“It’s still not easy, because I don’t think it is for everyone, but I don’t always feel like I’m laboring at it the way I did last year.”

By the beginning of his second year in law school, Ron Cluett knew exactly what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. His career plans may have taken shape more quickly than those of the rest of his Georgetown Law classmates — but then, he’s had a bit of a head start. Twenty years ago, when he was pursuing a Ph.D. in classics at Princeton, he heard a still, small voice questioning if he really didn’t want to be a lawyer instead.

“I don’t think it was saying, you want to go to Georgetown Law and be a tax lawyer ... but it was definitely saying, why did you open this door and not the other one?” says Cluett. “Maybe it’s my life story that I get to do both.”

Now, he’s well on his way. He spent the better part of last summer in England, pursuing a program in international tax law sponsored by Northwestern University and the University of London. While Georgetown Law has what he calls a “superb tax program,” those seven weeks abroad helped to solidify his career choice — allowing Cluett to hit the ground running at the start of his second year. While overseas, he

visited the International Bureau of Fiscal Documentation — a think tank for international tax law in Amsterdam — and even won the prize for the best work in European Union tax law from among the 20 participants in the program, including practicing lawyers. The experience “absolutely confirmed” that for Cluett, this was indeed the way to go.

Tax law?

For a former classics professor?

“There’s a strange and little remarked upon phenomenon — that there is a small group of former classics professors who have become tax lawyers,” laughs Cluett, who can name at least a half a dozen others who’ve gone the same route. “I think that the kind of translation and language work that you’re trained to do as a classics professor is actually on a very abstract level very close to what you do as a tax lawyer.”

While some law students shy away from tax law, Cluett sees the field as a rewarding challenge. “It’s like learning a new language ... the way the tax code is written, it’s really dense and complicated, but if you’re used to doing translation work, it’s like a puzzle.”

## Rewiring the Brain

Cluett is still one of the senior members of his class, more than 20 years older than some of his peers. Everything else about him, he says, has changed since he entered law school at age 45. Following the advice of a friend (another classics-professor-turned-tax-lawyer), he’s checked his Ph.D. at the door and embraced his new life as a law student. The parallels between the tax code and ancient foreign languages notwithstanding, he admits that shaking off his classics training was easier said than done — particularly when exam time rolled around.

“I found on exams last year that I was still writing law school exams like they were humanities exams, and that’s not how they should be written,” he says. While he didn’t go so far as to quote Plato, as did one of his classics-law student friends, he had to overcome the impulse not to go back and reshape a sentence or overanalyze a few issues at the expense of all the others. “The most challenging thing was rewiring my brain,” he says.

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Indeed, his background creates its own set of challenges, as some of the choices available to second-year law students didn't quite fit Cluett. While he recognized, for example, that being a law fellow would be a valuable experience in terms of the law, he had been a professor for 12 years, and won teaching awards to boot. So this year, he's taken on two research assistant jobs: one with Dean of Students Mitchell Bailin and Professor Steven Goldblatt regarding institutional policy issues and one with Professor Ethan Yale on tax policy. The jobs provide him with real practical experience, something he did not get over the summer. He's also volunteering with the D.C. organization Capital Area Asset Builders, helping low-income city residents claim the Earned Income Tax Credit.

### Deferring to the Pros

Like any 2L, Cluett relishes the relative freedom he now has to chart his own course. "As much as I liked my first year, the sense that I had one elective, and everything else was prescribed, I chafed against it. ... I fully understand why we have the 1L curriculum that we do; I just felt like, 'Where's my autonomy in this?'"

Now that he gets to choose, he's adopted a three-pronged strategy — with a strong foundation in tax being merely one of the prongs. He also wants to obtain a well-rounded general legal education and take a fun

course each semester, meaning one that simply interests him. His "fun" course for the spring is immigration law; in the fall, it was aviation law.

"I always thought that airports and airplanes were the coolest things in the world," he says, noting that he's becoming increasingly interested in questions of the environment where aviation is concerned. "It's also a review of all sorts of basic common law material, because you have a lot in aviation about liability, a lot about torts, a lot of jurisdiction — planes fly to multiple places, so some of it's a review of civil procedure."

Alternative Dispute Resolution, Constitutional Law, Administrative Law, and Law and Economics rounded out the mix for the fall semester.

### Gaining Confidence

Being a 2L, Cluett says, has given him a level of understanding that he calls exciting. "It's still not easy, because I don't think it is for everyone, but I don't always feel like I'm laboring at it the way I did last year," he says. "Sometimes I start to read an opinion or read a discussion of something, and I'll say, 'I bet I know where this is going,' and three para-

graphs later, that's the place it's gone ... last year, the response was looking back, and saying, 'Where did [this] come from?'"

The same can be said about Cluett himself — since he now knows where he's going. In November, he landed a summer associate position with Caplan & Drysdale, a Washington, D.C., tax firm, and he's already — slowly — thinking about the bar exam. In fact, he says he can already see the light at the end of the tunnel, and it's bittersweet to contemplate.

"There's just so much that you can do here, and how do you do it all in three years?" he asks. "You can't. I have to keep making choices about what I do here, and say, at the end of the day, I'm going to do this rather than that. But professionally, I have complete confidence that it's going to work out."

# LAURA NEWLAND

“You get to a place like this, and just being here is so incredible ... there’s this crazy energy around here.”

Laura Newland came to Georgetown Law with a strong desire to be a public interest lawyer. Now in her second year of law school, Newland is sticking to her guns — but it isn’t easy when she sees all the options available to her at the Law Center.

“When I hear starting salaries of firms or how much people are making during the summers, it’s astronomical,” she says, noting that though she refused to even think about going the law firm route when she arrived here as a 1L, she admits to wavering at times. “What kind of sacrifices would I be willing to make for that kind of money? It’s something I didn’t consider before going to law school.”

So far, though, she’s remaining true to who she is and where she wants to be. For starters, she’s enrolled in Georgetown Law’s year-long Harrison Institute Housing Clinic, which consumes about 25 hours a week of her time. The clinic helps low-income tenants purchase buildings from their landlords, renovate those buildings and operate them on their own.

“Everyone I talked to said clinics are a great thing at Georgetown,” she

says. “This one seemed to me to be teaching a new skill set as far as its home ownership aspect. I don’t know anything about that, so I thought that it would be interesting.”

Though the projects are too complex to be completed in an academic year, Newland was fortunate enough to have gotten in on the ground floor of a new initiative. Working with a partner and supervised by the clinic, she is helping a group of Northeast Washington, D.C., residents buy the 10-unit building they now rent.

“It’s cool if you see it from the very beginning, what it takes to start,” Newland says. “I’m not going to be able to see everything with this particular group — they’re going to have a multi-year process — so I think it probably has its pluses and minuses depending upon where you jump in.”

Where she has jumped in involves lots of contract work and financing. The things she learned in her 1L contracts class come in handy here, though she admits that the practical application of contracts is quite different from knowledge in a book.

There isn’t a lot of room to negotiate, as the contracts are standard, though she does have to make sure that all the terms she wants are included and perhaps modify them a little bit.

The most rewarding part, Newland says, is getting to know her clients. “For me, it’s getting to meet the tenants, working with the tenants — that’s why I signed up,” she says. “The contract stuff and the economic side, that has never really thrilled me, [but] it’s interesting to do that kind of stuff within the context of working with people who need that particular service.”

## Maintaining Community

Newland is no stranger to community-based work. After graduating from Kalamazoo College in 2003, she worked for a women’s shelter and a small nonprofit in Ohio called the Racial Fairness Project, helping to register eligible prisoners to vote.

Last summer, she paired her community interests with her new legal skills, working with Families against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM), a D.C.-based nonprofit group that advocates eliminating

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mandatory minimums in criminal sentencing. The group, founded by the family of a first-time drug offender sentenced to five years in a federal prison for growing marijuana, strives to promote fair sentencing laws.

“I was really interested in interning with [FAMM] because I hadn’t experienced the whole kind of immersion in criminal justice,” she says, noting that her previous nonprofit work involved things like education, public advocacy and community organizing. This summer job, on the other hand, provided a “much more intensive criminal justice focus” — with the added plus of being able to work with people on Capitol Hill. “I did some legislative analysis on some bills that were being proposed and I got to work on a couple of cases,” she says.

While the experience taught her that she did not want to do legislative analysis for a living, she did learn that she was on the right track as far as working with the community went.

“It’s really important for me to work with people and communities, which is something I didn’t do my first year of law school,” she says. “I realized that I really need to gain some perspective to figure out how I can use my law degree and still work within communities, and not just on theoretical questions.”

### Answering Questions

Newland likes the relative freedom of choosing her schedule now, although

she notes that with the real-world quality of the clinic, there’s very little room for flexibility. The worst thing about being a IL — and she’s not the only 2L to say it — was the feeling of always being told what to do, especially since she had been out of school for a few years.

“Last year I felt like I was in class pretty much from nine to five every day,” she says. “It’s nice not to have that kind of pressure, but with the clinic, it’s a different kind of pressure because you can’t plan for it.”

In the fall, besides the year-long clinic, she took Constitutional Law II and the Asian Americans and Legal Ideology Seminar, which looks at the experience of Asian Americans under the U.S. legal system. This spring, she’s taking Public Interest Advocacy and Tax Law. Outside of school, she says, she leads a very relaxed life.

When asked about any advice she might give to current 1Ls, Newland doesn’t cite the standard mantra about hard work, though she is no stranger to that herself. “When you’re in the process, it’s hard to really be outside of it, and having gone through it, I

feel that the entire law school experience has been about perspective and learning to maintain perspective,” she says.

Last year the challenges were personal, since she coped with the deaths of her grandfather and her partner’s mother. This year, she says, the struggle is to remain true to herself as she considers the many choices around her. “I don’t know if it’s the same for everybody, but for me, I came in with a particular idea of what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be, and remembering that, it’s difficult,” she notes, citing the lure of the law firms as an example. “You get to a place like here, and just being here is so incredible ... there’s this crazy energy around here; you feel that you have to do certain things to be considered successful. I am ambitious, but the way I’ve lived my life has been pretty laid back, just doing my own thing.”