

A Look Ahead

Students tackle career planning with alumni help.

On the face of it, **Jim Nickolas, JD candidate '17**, and **Merideth Hogan, BA '13** and **JD candidate '16**, don't have much in common, other than being students at Washburn Law. Nickolas, a retired Army Colonel of 28 years, is working toward a new career, with an illustrious one already concluded. Hogan, meanwhile, came to law school straight from Washburn undergrad, and is prepping for her first professional position at the end of this, her 3L year. Yet, the two found themselves in the same spot this past summer, counting on alumni to help steer their course.

In July and August, Washburn Law's Professional Development Office (PDO) invited former students and area professionals to share career insights with tomorrow's graduates. The interest in the Guest Professional Program was overwhelming. Over just nine days, 47 students flocked to the PDO to hear job-search advice, score resume reviews, and — maybe more than anything else — listen to the stories of people who've already lived it. The students met individually with one of 10 guest professionals (nine of whom were Washburn Law alumni).

Nickolas and Hogan each conferred with alumna **Kate Duncan Butler, '13**, now a research attorney with the Kansas Court of Appeals in Topeka. Only two years out of law school, Butler knows just what they're going through. The former English teacher, a writer and editor at heart, jumped at the chance to be of service.

"I really love doing resume review and cover letters, and that is the weirdest hobby to have. I was like, 'Sign me up, just tell me when you need me,'" Butler said. "I think that job search and resume building is a hard skill for people to learn. And so for me, it was an important niche thing I care about that I could fill, and to help these students be able to get jobs."

For Nickolas, a West Point and U.S. Army War College graduate, the meeting was a fact-finding mission. A second-generation American whose family hails from Greece, he sees the law as a continuation of his military service — another chance to repay the opportunities given to his parents and grandparents. As a 1L, he's new to all of it: the jargon, the hunt for internships, and the different fields available to attorneys.





“I have no idea, really, how I want to practice or what area I’m interested in, so gathering as much information as possible — especially early on — is important,” Nickolas said.

“Because I’ve had an extensive prior career, a lot of the professionals found that interesting. She went over my resume and helped me translate some of that Army activity into understandable text for lawyers.”

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Hogan, on the other hand, was already in the thick of it — applying for positions, honing her cover letters, prepping for interviews. With graduation looming, she had many of the particulars in order, including an impressive resume noting activities such as Habitat for Humanity and volunteer income tax clinics. In Butler, she found a like mind, not to mention a great example. While Hogan was working to secure a position as a judge’s research attorney, Butler already had that very job. It was a happy and fruitful coincidence.

“I think she gave me a lot of really great pointers for the interviews. And I think maybe because our personalities are very similar and she’s already in the real world, it fortified my courage to go out and apply for these jobs, and try to seek the best opportunity for myself,” Hogan said.

“I felt like her advice was particularly useful, maybe just because she was a woman advising another female student who wanted to get into the same career path.”

Since the program’s end, big things have been in the works. Nickolas has been interviewing for summer 2016 internships, taking every chance to learn about jobs that might suit his vast skills. Hogan has done exactly what she set out to do. She accepted a position as a research attorney with the Kansas Court of Appeals. One of the people she was excited to share the news with? You guessed it: Butler. The two will even be working in the same building, starting August 2016.

When asked whether they’d recommend programs like these to alumni and students, all three answered “yes” without reservation.

“Wholeheartedly. If students haven’t, they need to go and talk to someone who is a recent graduate — if for no other reason than to find out what opportunities are out there, and learn through their experience what to expect,” Nickolas said.

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Guide Washburn Law Students

To share your career experience and help students at the same time, contact:

Tammy King, Director
Professional Development Office
tammy.king1@washburn.edu
785.670.1703