The Importance of Social Justice

Hello, everyone:

One of the best things about being the new interim dean at Washburn University School of Law is that I get to write an introduction for this issue of the Washburn Lawyer, which will be seen by all our amazing alumni. This issue focuses on a topic of great importance: social justice. If this topic sounds a little broad and "squishy," well, it kind of is… at least on the surface. The term "social justice" gets bandied about a lot in the media and online, and sometimes is so misused it seems stripped of any real meaning. However, once we look at the essence of what social justice advocacy really is: using the skills and knowledge of the law to create laws and outcomes that make our society a better and more just place for all people, then it becomes apparent that it's something worth pursuing. And it's something that Washburn Law has been training people for ever since its founding.

When Washburn University was founded as Lincoln College in 1865, it embraced a commitment toward education for all, regardless of gender or race. This commitment continued with the founding of the School of Law, which enrolled its first African-American student, Samuel Cary, in 1907, and its first female student, Jessie Junette Nye, in 1909.

Graduates of Washburn Law have been making the nation a more just society in a number of ways throughout history. From Charles Scott, John Scott, and Charles Bledsoe, three Washburn lawyers who filed the Brown v. Board of Education case, to lawmakers such as Sen. Bob Dole and Rep. Jim Slattery, who helped fight for and secure passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in Congress, our alumni have been using the skills and knowledge learned at Washburn to ensure equal opportunity for all.

Alumni profiled in this issue uphold Washburn Law's commitment to social justice advocacy. Through activities such as arranging adoptions, bringing attention to the plight of recent immigrants, reforming the prosecution of crimes, helping underprivileged children, and promoting recycling, they are working to make the world a better and more just place for all of us.

This issue also highlights one of Washburn Law's most important contributions to the community: the Law Clinic. The Washburn Law Clinic is the second-largest provider of free civil legal services in Kansas. Each year, over 30 upper-level law students authorized to practice law by the Supreme Court of Kansas represent low-income Kansans in a range of legal matters. Students work on family law, civil, criminal, immigration, small business, and other cases in federal court, state court, municipal court, and before administrative agencies. In addition to direct representation, students also conduct "know your rights" presentations to community members who need legal information.

At Washburn Law, we take great pride in preparing students not only to be great lawyers, but to be great leaders who will advocate for what they believe. It's one of the things that makes Washburn Law such a special place.

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