After graduating from Oklahoma State University, Donald Fahrny, JD candidate ’18, wasn’t sure what was next. The political science major had considered going to law school, but without ever venturing further into Kansas than Wichita, Washburn wasn’t on his radar.

Then he talked to Tim Daniel, ’87, a long-time family friend who, in many ways, sees a past version of himself when he looks at Fahrny.

Like Daniel, Fahrny grew up in a small Oklahoma community, applied for law school in his late 20s, and only needed to visit Washburn once to determine that’s where he wanted to be.
Like Daniel, Fahrny couldn't be happier with his decision.

“It’s not what you’d generally expect given the perceived atmosphere of law schools,” Fahrny said. “Washburn has a very unique, accommodating, welcoming staff. He commented it would be like that, and he wasn’t wrong.”

After initially weighing options in Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana for his graduate studies, the Drumright, Okla., native said the sense of community and professors’ open-door policies made it clear Washburn was the right choice.

“I like being at a smaller school,” he said. “Coming to a bigger town but going to a smaller school is a very interesting shift in the scheme of things. It’s been everything I was expecting and beyond.”

The fact that Fahrny, now a 2L, has settled into an ideal atmosphere in law school is satisfying to Daniel as well.

“I told Donald, ‘I’m not trying to influence you, but go take a look for yourself.’ Daniel said. “There’s nothing old men like to do more than to give young men advice. They love it when it works for them, too.”

Part of why Daniel gave such a glowing review of the school is because he has his own collection of memories on campus. After teaching for 11 years, Daniel came to Washburn at the age of 28, one year younger than Fahrny was at the time he applied.

“I owe Washburn a great deal,” Daniel said. “I came in as an unemployed schoolteacher and left a lawyer. When I was there, I said ‘God willing, if I make it through law school and pass the bar, I will never complain about my job.’ That’s one promise I’ve always kept. It’s a wonderful way to make a living.”

After graduating 28 years ago, Daniel opened his solo practice in Drumright and has worked as a jack-of-all-trades lawyer there ever since. He credits much of his success to the lessons he learned at Washburn and had a feeling Fahrny would reap similar benefits if he headed north to Topeka.

“I told Donald his experience in 2015 would be the same as mine was in the 80s,” he said. “There’s a sense that if you’re accepted, they make a commitment to you.”

Recommendations like Daniel’s aren’t uncommon at Washburn Law. In fact, they’re one of the most prevalent ways the school finds prospective students.

Preston Nicholson, admissions director of Washburn Law, said that was more evident than ever entering the current semester.

“Of those who applied for fall 2016, more than half had indicated they heard of Washburn through word of mouth,” he said. “Of those, 29 percent said they heard about the school through an alum — the highest percentage of any group.”

Nicholson said the best way for alumni to connect students with Washburn is to contact the admissions office, and have the applicant reach out as well.

“If students come through an alum referral, we can waive the application fee,” he said. “We also invite the alum to come along when students tour campus so both parties can get the most accurate information available.”

Nicholson said common selling points for the school include its nationally recognized legal writing and government law programs, value in tuition, and scholarship opportunities. The fact that alumni have experienced all of this firsthand explains why they’re so quick to recommend Washburn to others.

Daniel, for example, remains thankful for the complete education he received, especially working in a community where he takes on cases from just about anyone who walks in the door.

“I do everything from complex litigation to helping illiterate people read a form,” he said. “It’s small-town law. When people ask what I do, I tell them, ‘I help people with problems they can’t resolve themselves.’”

Fahrny is taking steps to ensure he becomes similarly well-versed in a variety of subjects. During summer break, he took his first trip outside the country for a six-week session in Barbados, which consisted of courses comparing the legal environment of the Caribbean to the United States.

On campus, Fahrny is a member of the AAJ Trial Team and the Agricultural Law Society. His educational opportunities, both in Topeka and abroad, have given him all the more reason to be pleased with his Washburn experience — and perhaps one day provide a recommendation of his own.

“Absolutely, Washburn is an undiscovered gem,” he said. “I’d recommend it to anybody. Studying law might be an individual thing, and it has to be right for you, but as far as Washburn, I’d definitely recommend it.”