New Beginnings for Nontraditional Students

David Carrera

The first year of law school is always a new beginning, but particularly so for 17 entering students in the class of 1998. The class includes almost twice as many “terminal degree” recipients as any class in the school’s history. A terminal degree is the highest level of formal education in a field of study. James Forsyth, assistant dean for admissions, believes these nontraditional students are a vital part of the student body. “The insight and career experience they lend to the classroom are invaluable and enrich the overall law school experience for every student,” he says.

The class of 1998 claims students with MDs, PhDs, EdDs and DDSs. Their careers include running for public office, directing a pathology department and teaching Spanish. They are graduates of Harvard, Columbia and Johns Hopkins, to name a few.

Why would someone with such educational credentials and professional success give up an established career, good income and free time to enter law school? I was curious myself and found most interesting answers.
What experience accounts for your desire to see change in China’s legal system?

As a child, I remember quite vividly the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. People killed each other for what seemed like no apparent reason. The country was in chaos. Unfortunately, that was also the most precious time of my educational life, the time when basic education shapes one’s knowledge and morals.

I started elementary school in 1966 and finished high school in 1976. For those 10 years most time was wasted because the schools were usually closed. They were open only for very short times. Colleges were closed. It was a chaotic situation with no law—no lawyers, judges or courts. The loss of life was atrocious. After Mao died in 1976, the killing ended. My experience as a young person in China underscores my desire to see change brought to the legal system.

How did you study and learn about the rest of the world?

During the 1960s and 1970s, China was still under a Communist regime and America was portrayed as the worst place on earth. We were told that people were killed in the streets, starving to death, etc. After Mao died, the door opened. In 1973, Nixon began diplomatic relations with China. Chinese people went to America and found a totally different country than what they were told. They saw skyscrapers, highways, cars and everything China(473,269),(556,364)

Dr. Xiang Wang, class of 1998, hopes to combine experience in science, technology and industry with knowledge of the law for a new career in international business.

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In China, when you graduate from college, your job is assigned by the government. So in exchange for not allowing me to go to America, they gave me a list of jobs from which I could choose—something unheard of at the time. I chose the best job, in Beijing, where much was known about America. I learned I could take an exam—the equivalent of the GRE—and come to America myself, which I did. I received a scholarship from Drexel University in 1984—two years after I graduated. Because I came to America to study on my terms and not the Chinese government’s, I feel no obligation. I sleep better at night.

How do you see the United States and China interacting in the future?

Now we’re in a global economy. China is America’s second largest trade partner—second only to Japan. Ten to 15 years ago, China barely made the list of trade partners with the U.S. China needs America’s technology products and the U.S. needs China’s market. Therefore, we have a perfect match. I see myself, once I graduate from law school, as a person with a technical and a legal background who is able to put deals together for both countries, predominantly with regard to technology products and international corporate transactions. The technology industry will be most mutually beneficial to both countries.

Is the American legal system as you know it adaptable to the Chinese culture?

The two cultures are so different from each other; some issues can be learned and others cannot. The law with regard to the technological industry is adaptable, with some modification. Chinese intellectual property laws recently have been established. Many of these laws have been adapted from the American system.

Explain in lay terms, the two patents you hold.

The patents deal with noninvasive hemodynamic monitoring systems. Patients usually are monitored for their cardiac output or heart function with a catheter, a device used inside your body. It’s invasive, carries risk of infection and it costs a lot of money. Each year there are 38 million operations in this country. Sixty thousand people will die needlessly this year from complications caused by the use of catheters.

My patents involve methods that noninvasively monitor patients’ hemodynamic systems. My method can be applied by a nurse. It doesn’t...
DEAN’S PARTNERS INITIATIVE LAUNCHED

On June 5, 1995, Graeme Bush, chairman of the 1995-96 Law School Fund Board, was host for a dinner meeting at the firm Caplin & Drysdale in Washington, D.C. Invitees included selected members of the Maryland Law School Club. The meeting introduced the Dean’s Partners initiative, aimed at involving the school’s most committed supporters in the face-to-face solicitation process as well as bolstering support at the $2,000 level and above.

The dinner meeting was a tremendous success, raising more than $12,000 in new unrestricted support to the Law School Fund. More important, it involved eight alumni in the art of peer solicitation. Each participant selected five alumni to visit in regard to their gift to the 1995-96 Law School Fund.

This effort is the first of its kind at the University of Maryland School of Law. We plan to hold similar dinner meetings in the future and hope that you will join us in our effort to become the nation’s top public law school.

FROM PAGE 11 Dr. Xiang Wang require a doctor, an x-ray technician or an anesthesiologist, and there is no risk of infection. It’s less expensive, simple to perform and virtually risk-free to the patient.

What is the biggest asset you will lend to the legal profession or the study of law?

There are people, perhaps not many, who have strong technical backgrounds and who eventually went on to study law. Those people can bring technology and law together, and they have the potential to make a big impact in a changing world where economies are now viewed on a global basis. They can bring countries together with a goal of economic well-being. Everything is high-tech and will continue to be high-tech, resulting in more issues that will require backgrounds in more than one discipline.

As executive director of research and development at Renaissance Technologies, what are your responsibilities?

My day-to-day responsibilities include technical evaluation of current and new products. We evaluate patents from other companies to see if there is the need to develop new products. We are not a mass manufacturer company. We design and protect product development and then subcontract to other companies for assembly. My job also entails screening patents and developing new products, as well as researching contracts between corporations—a responsibility that requires a great deal of travel.

What is your goal once you are armed with a law degree and where do you see yourself professionally five to ten years from now?

My goal will be eventually to have my own firm that will deal with international business, in particular technology issues fused together between the Asian countries and America. Either that or eventually I will get involved in political matters with the two countries.

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If your class note does not appear in the next issue, we haven’t forgotten you! Due to the volume of S.I.T.s, there may be a delay in publication. Thanks for your patience.

If you had two minutes to tell thousands of lawyers anything you wished, what would you say?

I wish the opportunity to study the law had presented itself much earlier. If I could have become a lawyer sooner, I might have already made an impact. But, of course, that’s not possible. I envy all who have the knowledge provided by a legal education, and sometimes wish that everyone who has the ability will at some point decide to make a difference, regardless of where they choose to make that difference.