



Starr Granby '07

TESTING HER WITS AS A PUBLIC DEFENDER

Starr Granby '07 is aware that more students apply for jobs as prosecutors than as public defenders. But she's sticking with the defenders' side.

"I have more compassion for those who are accused of crimes," she said. Granby attributes her devotion to the cause of the accused to her Christian upbringing and to her life experience. She grew up in New York City and witnessed friends and classmates who lacked opportunities and wound up in jail. "My mom's a housewife and my dad's a teacher," she explains. "I had both my parents; I had a net at home, and I didn't fall into things [my classmates] did."

Granby's public service work includes an unpaid stint with New York City Youth at Risk—a program for teenage ex-convicts—and summer jobs with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law and the Public Defender Service in Washington, DC. As a third-year student, she's participating in BC Defenders, the Law School's public defense clinic.

For Granby, the clinic has made the impact of public defense more tangible. It was where she got her first look at prisoners behind bars. The reality of seeing people caged, she says, was so much more powerful than her previously abstract understanding of imprisonment. "If I don't defend my client like I should, or if a prosecutor makes a mistake and puts the wrong person in jail....," she muses, comprehending in a new way exactly what is at stake.

The clinic has also given Granby a taste of what it's like to succeed as a public defender. She drafted a motion asking a judge to rethink a client's jail sentence, which was presented in court by the lawyer she was assisting on the case. "She emailed me and said, 'Guess what! The motion you drafted worked! He's out!'" recalls Granby. "It made me realize how important this work is. This piece of paper made a difference between this person being incarcerated and this person being out."

Granby believes that pro bono and public interest experiences are central to educating aware and deep-thinking lawyers. She says that students who have this exposure are forced to face their assumptions, rethink their beliefs, and notice different angles. "It makes you a better lawyer, no matter where you are," she says.

—JZ

nothing to apologize for in going to a corporate law firm," he says. "When you're representing Exxon in a courtroom and you see a person in poverty in the court, you'll know what that means. You'll be rich and will be able to pitch in to do good work for the people who need it."

A source of strength for BC Law's public interest and pro bono programs is the students themselves. For example, PILF, noted for its summer stipend program that makes it affordable for students to take on unpaid public interest internships after their first and second years, is run by students. And 2006 marked the second year of the Public Interest Retreat, which was funded by the Office of the Dean but organized and managed entirely by students. Retreat organizer Gavriel Wolfe '07 says the weekend is an important source of support for students who want to make public interest a centerpiece of their legal careers. "Returning to school in the fall, they discover that many of their colleagues are returning with job offers and a sense of security for their next move," says Wolfe. "The job path for those interested in public interest work is not as well lit. It is reinforcing to come back and spend time in a community of people like you who are casting about with flashlights to find their way." Wolfe's observations point to another paradox: Though typically lower paying, the public interest job market is tight, competitive, and less conducive to systematic job hunting.

Some students talk about a divergence on campus among those who increasingly look to private sector careers and those who continue to hold a candle for public service. "A lot of students who enter BC wanting to do public interest work change their minds," says Hickey. "There's a divide that develops. What BC could do better is make clear that going to a law firm is not abandoning your ideals and sense of wanting to do good in the world. Students are getting out there and learning they can do pro bono work even if they are not making it a focus of their careers."

Hickey thinks she's found her way to do that by joining Bingham McCutchen. During her stint in the Peace Corps, Hickey witnessed two women die in childbirth. Both women were in labor with their twelfth child. Both had been denied access to birth control, in part, because of the patriarchal culture that refused women the right to determine their reproductive destinies and bestowed social status on large families, and in part because of President Bush's 2001 reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule. The rule disallows US aid for family planning to organizations that use their own, non-US money for abortions, abortion counseling, or abortion advocacy.

"Decisions were being made in boardrooms in a Western country that were having a grassroots impact," Hickey says. The incident was one of many reasons she decided to become a lawyer: so that she'd be able to speak with authority on matters of human rights and equality.

Hickey points to the Massachusetts Rules of Ethics, which say that every lawyer should aspire to doing twenty-five hours a year of pro bono work. "We're trained, we're in a unique position to make a difference for individuals. BC Law is creating lawyers to serve the community," she says.

Regarding her decision to deviate from a straightforward public interest career to join a corporate firm, Hickey says, "Bingham has given a lot of support to public interest work at BC." She was especially impressed with Bingham's policy