

STUDENTlife

A CHANCE TO MEET FOUR BUSY, MOTIVATED UW LAW STUDENTS

by Deborah J. Davidson



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ALVIN CHU ('02)

IF A HISTORY OF overcoming challenges is good preparation for law school, keep your eye on Alvin Chu: this young man embraces challenges with his whole heart—and voice. Born in Guatemala, he lived there until the age of three, when the family moved to New York. (His mother was from Canton and his father from Hong Kong.) Moving to a new country at that tender age forced him to master a third language—after Spanish and Cantonese—and he developed a stutter. Some years later, in what was to become a pattern for life, he decided to face that challenge head on. By then living in Santa Cruz, California, he heard a lawyer speak at a seventh-grade career fair, and thought, “This guy talks a lot.” Then and there, he decided to become a lawyer—to choose a profession that forced him to talk all the

time—and he overcame the stutter, all on his own. As he confronted and ultimately overcame the challenge of stuttering, he vowed to become an advocate for others with similar problems—in short, those without a voice.

“I am fascinated by the thing I cannot master. I believe there is an infinite learning curve,” Alvin mused. Spurred by this attitude, he has tackled, with varying degrees of success, the violin, chess, golf, and of course, a law degree. As well as a business degree. Why a dual program?

The answer lies in Alvin's love—no, passion—for a challenge. “I won't pursue anything unless I feel a passion for it,” he says, “including law.” Having worked one summer at the office of corporation counsel in Washington, D.C., (similar to a district attorney's office), Alvin experienced the private side of law practice by clerking with Morrison Foerster, a Palo Alto, California firm he admires for its multicultural focus and passion for the law and social justice, and the “breadth and depth of the opportunities it offers me.” He followed this experience with a clerkship at the U.S. Department of Justice, Antitrust Division.

While the future is very real for Alvin, he's also deeply involved in the life of the Law School, through a variety of organizations. As a member and officer of the Asian Pacific American Law Student Association (APALSA), he is helping to coordinate the Thomas Tang Moot Court competition this fall, and as a member of the *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, he has written an article titled “Vindicating the Tiananmen Square Massacre: The Case Against Li Peng,” which is slated for publication.

Alvin likes it here in the Midwest, but has one gigantic complaint: no place in Madison, he says, serves decent Chinese food. Which of course, he is passionate about. For Alvin Chu, that is really the only way to be.

BRIDGET KEARNS ('02)

FOR THIRD-YEAR LAW STUDENT Bridget Kearns, the seeds of activism were planted early. While campaigning for Michael Dukakis in junior high, she met Kitty Dukakis and became fascinated with politics and feminist issues. High school debate honed her interest in ideas, as did a rapidly paced undergraduate program at the College of St. Catherine, in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she majored in English and history. Combining a feminist zeal with a historical bent, Bridget wrote theses on Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf, and the history of Russian women's education in the 19th century. Caring for children at a local homeless shelter, peer tutoring and being a student ambassador didn't deter Bridget from graduating in three years. She stayed on at St. Cate's as an admissions counselor for three years before applying to law schools.

And why UW for this Duluth native, when another Big Ten law school was just down the Interstate? Bridget cited two factors: Assistant Dean for Admissions Beth Kransberger's tireless recruitment efforts, and the Nanny Factor. Nanny Factor? Bridget laughed, "I was a nanny for a couple of lawyers—the husband had gone to the University of Minnesota, the wife to UW. They were constantly arguing the merits of their schools ... but UW sounded like more fun. And the way I *thought* it is was the way it is."

A first-year recipient of a Bruce F. Beilfuss award for outstanding service to the Law School, Bridget is Senior Submissions Editor for the *Wisconsin Women's Law Journal*, a member of the *Wisconsin Law Review* and Moot Court. While her first law school summer was spent interning at a Minnesota public defender's office, her second found her at Faegre & Benson in Minneapolis until mid-July, and the remainder of the summer at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher in Washington, D.C., where classmate Gabrielle Bina showed her the ropes.

When asked whether that long-ago encounter with the Dukakis clan sparked a desire for a career in politics, Bridget gave an adamant negative: "Perhaps behind the scenes. There's too much schmoozing in politics." But a stint in Nicaragua with Habitat for Humanity did ignite an interest in larger social issues. "I started thinking about governmental policy and the structure of society, especially how govern-



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Such weighty questions might be asked in a law school class, perhaps by Professor Jane Schacter, a teacher Bridget greatly admires: "She makes things understandable; even governmental policy is clear." In fact, Bridget confessed fond feelings for all her professors.

Bridget is spending the first semester of her third year in Florence, Italy, at the European University Institute, studying parental leave policies of the European Union and the United States. UW Law students compete for four spots, and students from only two other law schools—NYU and Columbia—may participate. A two-year clerkship with Judge E. Richard Weber in the Eastern District of Missouri awaits her upon graduation.

Although uncertain of what the future holds, yet sanguine about it, Bridget laughingly shared the secret of her self-confidence: "It's a quote from Professor [Walter] Dickey: 'Often wrong, but never in doubt.'"

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CHRISTINA GEHRKE ('02)

ALTHOUGH SHE IS NOW every inch a Badger, third-year law student Christina Gehrke is originally from Longview, Texas, and went to high school near Houston. A philosophy and linguistics major at MIT, she considered pursuing her Ph.D. in linguistics, but was concerned about the practical application of the degree, so law school became an attractive option. Academic grounding in linguistics and philosophy offered a firm foothold in law school.

The decision to attend Wisconsin came easily—her mother is from Stoughton and her father from Fennimore. Both went to UW for their undergradu-

ate degrees. In fact, the Wisconsin roots exerted their pull while Christina was at MIT, when her parents moved back to Fennimore, where they are semi-retired beef farmers.

MIT is best known for its technical superiority, but it is superior in one other respect that attracted Christina—it has a world-class women's hockey team. Christina played all four undergraduate years as a left wing, attending classes by day and practicing five times a week during the season. But while most young people reluctantly say goodbye to the pads as they clutch that cherished diploma, Christina was granted a one-year reprieve. While investigating law schools, she heard that Wisconsin was starting a varsity women's hockey team, and knowing about Wisconsin's hockey dynasty, wondered whether she might be good enough to make it. As it turned out, Wisconsin's new coach, Julie Sasner, had heard about MIT's team, and most especially its coach, Katya Pashkevich. Coach Pashkevich had played for the Russian national team and is a likely pick for the next Olympics. Sasner was eager to meet Christina—and the rest is, as they say, history.

With one year of varsity eligibility left, Christina played throughout her first year of law school, a time when most law students' exercise regime consists of jogging to make a class and sprinting from one stack of books in the library to another. Both the team and Christina did well: the team finished 19-14-2 and placed third in the WCHA during the team's inaugural year.

And what beckons, now that Christina has traded hockey goals for career goals? One of Christina's favorite teachers, Carin Clauss, has inspired Christina to investigate the possibilities in employment law. Via the labor law clinical program, Christina has interned at the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission, and can envision a career in labor or contractual law.

When asked whether she would recommend that others spend their first year of law school as a varsity athlete, Christina shrugged: "I don't see why not. I'm not the most brilliant student, and I did it. Other students have young children, and full-time jobs, and hockey is less responsibility than those. It kept me from stressing out in law school—I didn't have enough time to be stressed!" With an attitude like that, Christina makes the transition from the Blue Line to blue books look easy.

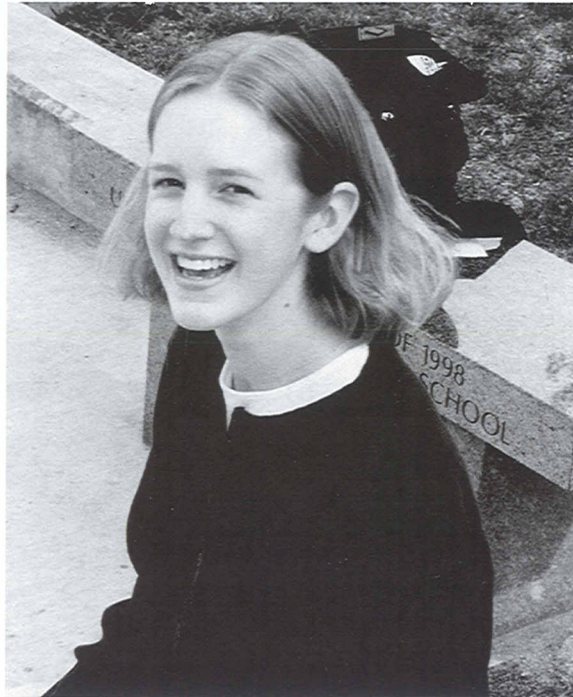
MOLLY McKEGNEY ('03)

OFTEN IT'S A SMALL THING that sparks an entire career. For law student Molly McKegney, it was a Madison West High School class in criminal justice. A short ride up Regent Street brought her to UW-Madison for college, and a major in Behavioral Science and Law, which emphasizes criminal justice. While there, she took the only undergraduate course taught at the Law School—Law in Action—and a future in the law was forged.

A recipient of a prestigious Rath scholarship—a merit-based full tuition and stipend award for three years—Molly has already made her mark in the criminal justice system. While still an undergraduate, she interned in the Dane County Sheriff's office, and spent Summer 2000 as the assistant to the Chief of the UW Police Department. Molly considers what she learned to be “background information” for her planned career as a prosecutor: “I was able to see what happens before the case goes to the D.A.” She also spent 100 hours in jail, voluntarily, she quickly added, interviewing inmates about jail conditions and their offenses. There was also a lot of hands-on experience: “I got to serve process, go on boat patrol, and observe air traffic control at the airport. In my UW job, I went on police car ride-alongs to out-of-the-way places, like on the lake path [otherwise forbidden], and I toured the Camp Randall police station and observed their security equipment.” She also participated in an in-service at the shooting range, learning how to shoot firearms and enter and clear rooms.

This past summer, Molly was an intern with the Remington Center's LAIP (Legal Assistance to Institutionalized Persons) Program, and found that her familiarity with the police department was excellent preparation for working with individuals in prison. She foresees that her career as a prosecutor will be enriched by having first-hand knowledge of these first and last stages of a person's experience with the criminal justice system.

Special mentors to Molly were professors John Pray and Keith Findley, directors of the Wisconsin Innocence Project, which freed wrongly convicted Christopher Ochoa last winter. These busy men had found time to teach two weeks of the Law in Action class Molly took as an undergraduate, and a connection was forged. Molly asked Professors



Her honors thesis: “The Constitutionality of a DNA Databank for All Arrestees”

Pray and Findley to advise her on her Honors thesis: “The Constitutionality of a DNA Databank for All Arrestees.” Molly's opinion was that such a databank would pass constitutional muster; this topical issue remains very much alive in our court system at this writing.

When asked what she likes about the UW Law School, Molly didn't hesitate: “I like the *community*—people are so smart and motivated. In comparison, for once, I'm laid back. It's not that I've changed, but for the first time in my life, everyone works as hard as I do!” While “laid back” is undoubtedly a relative term, this young woman's smile is evidence enough: she has found her calling, and is loving every minute of it. ♦