

## **UVA LAW | Admitted Open House Alumni Panel**

LAURA HOWELL: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us for our esteemed Alumni panel. I am so excited that you're all here today. So I'll just jump off by introducing each of them to you. You can see them all on screen right now, and then I'll turn it over to them in turn to tell you a little bit more about themselves.

So our most recent graduate is Erin Seagears. She is a 2020 graduate of the law school and is currently clerking for the Baltimore City Circuit Court. During law school, she actually clerked on the Charlottesville Circuit Court and spent her summers doing public interest work for the Legal Aid Justice Center here in Charlottesville, and then for the Office of the Public Defender in Baltimore, Maryland.

At UVA Law, she was on the editorial board of the Virginia Journal for Social Policy and the Law. She was also Co-president of the program for law and public service. She was named to the Raven Society and won the law school's Gregory Swanson award, so.

Grace Fu is a 2009 graduate of the law school. She is currently the Executive Vice President of Human Resources, General Counsel, and Secretary for Barneys New York. She also serves on the board of directors of the Barneys New York Foundation. She has previously served as the Chief Legal and Administrative Officer as well as the Executive Vice President of Human Resources, overseeing all legal risk, compliance, and human resources functions at that company. Prior to that, she was Deputy General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer at Tiger Management. And before that, she worked on mergers and acquisitions at Skadden Arps in New York City.

Judge Dan Bress is also with us. He is a judge on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. He is a 2005 graduate of UVA law, where he served as Editor in Chief of the Virginia Law Review. After law school, he clerked on the US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and then four Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia.

Prior to his appointment to the bench in 2019, he was a partner at Kirkland and Ellis in Washington DC and also served as an adjunct Professor at UVA Law from 2009 to 2011. And Dan, I have to tell you, that was when I was in law school, and I never able to get into one of your classes. That is how popular you were, so.

Our final distinguished alum here with us today is Toby Heytens. He is currently the Solicitor General for the Commonwealth of Virginia and a 2000 graduate of UVA Law. He served as articles editor. My goodness. Words are hard sometimes-- of the Virginia Law Review while he was here. And after graduating from law school, he clerked for the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. He also served as a Bristowe Fellow in the US DOJ in the Solicitor General's Office there. And he also clerked for Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

He joined the faculty at UVA Law back in 2006 and then took a brief hiatus to return to the US Solicitor General's Office, where he's argued multiple cases before the United States Supreme Court. He returned to the law school faculty back in 2010 until he was pulled from us for a leave of absence in 2018 to serve as the Solicitor General.

So having told you a little bit about all that these guys have accomplished-- these guys and ladies have accomplished-- in the time since they graduated from law school, I'll turn it over to them, first to Erin, and let them take it each in turn. And then we'll loop back for a Q&A at the end. So Erin, turning it over to you.

**ERIN**

**SEAGEARS:**

Well, thank you for that kind introduction, Laura. And I first of all just say how happy and excited I am to be able to serve-- and humbled I am to be able to serve on this Alumni panel. Though I was only a 0L one year, I've always loved admitted students open house, just a chance to be able to talk with admitted students and really just show them how wonderful UVA Law is and all the amazing things we have going on here. So it really is a pleasure to be speaking to you all this morning.

For me, my story coming into law school, I knew I wanted to go to law school to be an advocate for children to do juvenile justice work. But I didn't know much besides that. I'm the first one in my family to go to law school. Didn't know much about law school or the legal field. I just knew that is what I wanted to do with my law degree, is to help children in need.

And I'm so grateful that UVA in so many ways equipped me and gave me the experiences that I needed to be able to do that, to feel like I can achieve that. I had just the amazing-- just amazing time at UVA Law. Had awesome professors who were so smart and taught me so much and was even able to have professors who could mentor me specifically in juvenile justice, which was really helpful and, to this day, serve as such a resource to me in so many ways.

I was able to take clinics where I worked on cases and even got to argue for a juvenile who was convicted as an adult and argue for his early release so that he could go to college. And that's another experience that I didn't think I would ever be able to have while in law school. So I'm just so grateful for all that I was-- I came to law school, I came to UVA Law to be an advocate for children. And UVA Law helped me to do that in so many ways and, on top of all of that, just had a blast because I'm sure you'll hear the community here at UVA, both the students and even the professors and the administrators are so amazing. And so I truly believe it's the happiest place that anyone could do law school.

And so in addition to just all that UVA gave me in terms of being able to achieve my goals to be a juvenile justice attorney, I also had a great time doing it here in Charlottesville. So I wouldn't trade my time here, my experience here at law school for anything. And yeah, I'm just happy to share more and answer any questions you guys have later on about that time.

**GRACE FU:**

I'm Grace Fu, as Laura mentioned. And I'm a 2009 UVA Law grad. I'm delighted to be here to be speaking with all of you. I overheard that there's hundreds of you. So no pressure for us, but we're delighted to speak with you.

And I just wanted to share a little bit of my story. I think Laura gave a pretty comprehensive summary of my resume, but she did not mention my activities at UVA Law. So I'll give you a quick review of those.

So I was on VJIL, the Virginia Journal of International Law. And I was the Editor in Chief of VJIL. I was also a very active peer advisor, so I was a peer advisor for my last two years and loved the experience mentoring numerous students at the law school, and still keep in touch with a number of them today, I would say, many years later. And I was also part of the PILA board, the Public Interest Law Association, which was a big part of my time at UVA Law School.

So very involved. But I think that UVA is a place where if you are a leader-- and most people who go to law school at UVA are natural leaders-- there's some leadership opportunity for you. And many times, there's more than just one leadership opportunity for you, which was certainly my experience and I think the experience of most other UVA Law School students.

I went to law school as a bit of a leap of faith, I think. I did not know that it was the right path for me. I did not have lawyers in my family. And I actually really did not know what corporate law was, I would say, until my first job out of law school. I really just thought lawyers were litigators, honestly. Even as a college senior, I really just had no appreciation for what corporate lawyers did.

I went into finance after college, and I actually liked it quite a bit. But I just didn't see many female role models around me in finance. And that was at that time 2003, so a while ago but not too long ago. And I thought I need to think through what my long term plans are.

So one of the great things about working in finance-- at that point I was an analyst at an investment bank-- was I saw a lot of corporate lawyers around me. And I thought they did some things that I wanted to try to do. And I wanted to try to draft agreements. But I still wanted to be part of the deal. I wanted to try to analyze the deal structurally. And I thought, let me try to go to law school to see if I can do this.

And I applied to a number of different schools. I had a mentor in my neighborhood that I grew up in who went to Harvard Law School. And he really pushed me to apply. Really didn't know much about UVA. I had never been to Charlottesville. But when I visited, I really felt this connection to the school. And I had been living in New York at the time. So if you think about Charlottesville versus New York City, quite a drastic change.

And I thought, if I'm going to do this for three years, I want to be at a place where I feel like I can really focus on my education. And I just thought people were really nice. And I didn't get that same feeling at every law school that I visited. And I think that first impression was exactly spot on. I had that experience all the way through at UVA. So really a unique, I would say, place.

And one of the great things about UVA too, and one of the reasons why I chose it in addition to feeling charmed by my experience visiting, was there was a really strong law in business track too. And I got to take a bunch of different courses that really, I think, prepared me to be a corporate lawyer. So I went off after UVA to Skadden in New York City. Skadden's a very corporate-focused law firm.

And I will say that, in my class, I felt very, very well prepared at Skadden to be a corporate lawyer and to just be a functioning professional. I think that one of the things that you need to learn how to do when you have a real job is to interact with people, is to know how to talk to your clients, talk to senior people, talk to junior people. And that's really a social skill. It's not the law. And I think that UVA Law prepares you in that way too. So it prepares you because it teaches you the substance of what you need to know, but it teaches you how to be collegial and collaborative and be able to talk to people. And that's just a big part of what you do as a lawyer.

And so I had a great time at Skadden. I thought that UVA they set me up really, really well. And I would say that UVA set me up for Skadden. And Skadden set me up for the next thing that I went on to do, and the next thing and the next thing. And so I think UVA really was a key part of my success in my career.

So I have nothing but amazing things to say about the law school. Even people that I meet after the fact to who went to UVA-- I feel like I've known them for forever, including our panelists today. I feel like these could all be quick friends, even though we just met 15 minutes ago. And really do encourage all of you to take a very good look at UVA Law School. It's unfortunate that you all can't go to campus and have the same experience that all of us had, but please do try to learn as much as possible, reach out to alums, reach out to staff at the law school. Everybody is more than willing to engage and to give you our perspectives on our experience in the law school. So with that, I'll turn it over to Dan.

**DANIEL BRESS:** Thank you, Grace. And good afternoon. And for those of us like me on the West Coast, good morning. My name is Dan Bress. I was UVA Class of 2005.

I guess I'll start by saying thank you for having me. The admitted students weekend in some ways is where it all begins for law students. And it's just a privilege to be with you. I know how difficult it is to get into law school and how hard all of you worked to get to this point your lives and careers. And it's a very big step for everyone, just as it was for us. And so I feel like I know what you're going through, and I know what you're thinking about, and I want to wish each of you all the very best. And also to the law school, thanks for inviting me. And of course, Toby, Grace and Erin-- great to be with you here.

It's fascinating to hear people's stories. And I do very much echo Grace's comments that if you were to pull 10 people from UVA Law from all different classes and different generations and backgrounds and put them in a room for an hour, they would have just the most wonderful conversation. And so this feels a little bit like that.

A little bit about me-- I'm a small town person. I grew up here in California in a town called Gilroy, garlic capital of the world. And I guess they let me out. And I moved to the East Coast and went to Harvard for undergrad and then went to work in Washington for a little while and decided I would go to law school.

You all are probably much more sophisticated consumer of law schools than I was at the time. I was going to law school because my now wife-- then girlfriend-- was going to law school. And I thought, oh, that sounds like a good thing to do too. And so I went to UVA.

And I will tell you, there are decisions you look back on in life as major turning points. And for me, going to UVA really was that. It was a very formative experience intellectually. It was a very formative experience socially. And it really I think-- in some ways, I look at it as very much the beginning of my professional career.

From UVA, I ended up clerking for two years and actually stayed in Charlottesville for another year because I clerked on the Fourth Circuit, and my judge happened to live in Charlottesville. So I was on the four-year plan. And then I was lucky enough to go and clerk for Justice Scalia on the Supreme Court.

And I thought at-- when I was in law school, I thought maybe I would spend some of my career in public service. But then I ended up going to a private law firm, Kirkland and Ellis. And I absolutely loved it. I had a wonderful career there. I loved being a civil litigator. I was a BigLaw partner and happy to have that label. It was a great experience. It was challenging on a daily basis-- fascinating, difficult, exhilarating, everything you could put next to it.

And then I had this opportunity to come up to be a judge. And that's what I am now. I have returned home to California. I'm a judge here on the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit.

Some of you may have heard of it. And if you haven't, that's fine. You're going to learn lots about our federal courts and state court systems. But we have the federal district courts, Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court. So I'm right there smack in the middle, and very lucky to have a wonderful circuit here. I hear appeals coming out of nine different states in our Western United States. It's a fascinating job on a daily basis.

And one thing that I most enjoy is that I have law clerks. I was a law clerk. Now I have my own law clerks. And that is my pathway to UVA still is to have UVA graduates who decide to come out and spend a year in San Francisco-- not a terrible place to have to spend a year.

But I've had a UVA law clerk every year, and I suspect I will. They're great people. They bring the same values that I think a lot of UVA lawyers bring, which is a respect for other people and a respect for the law and, really, a deep sense of appreciation for all the people that helped us to get to this point and for the importance of the American legal system.

You're lucky and you're fortunate. But you're also people who are going to make an incredible contribution to our country. And it's something I see every day as a judge. Lawyers have a central role to play here in America. This is a wonderful country. And it's something I reflect on quite a bit when I think about what I get to do on a daily basis and how I trace so much of that back to my experience at the law school. So it's a real privilege and pleasure to be here. I'm going to turn it over to Toby.

I will tell you all that when you're in law school, you'll always look up to the people who are a couple of years older. They're like gods to you. And Toby was a few years ahead of me. And Toby was one of those people. He's extremely accomplished lawyer, academic, and now Solicitor General of the Commonwealth of Virginia. So Toby, I'll turn it over to you, my friend.

**TOBY HEYTENS:** So thank you all for being here, thank you all for having me, and thank you to everybody else who's doing this. Yeah. I don't know what I have to add, so let me give you just a couple of quick thoughts about my background because we've heard from people who were in New York, people who were on the West Coast.

So I grew up in the Midwest. I grew up in a small town in the Midwest in northern Wisconsin. If you can picture Lake Superior jutting out like a finger pointed towards the West coast, I am from the extreme Western tip of Lake Superior is where I spent my entire life until I went away to college. And I didn't go that far because I went to college in St. Paul, Minnesota, which was about as far as I felt comfortable doing at that point in my life.

I'm from a town that a lot of people don't go very far from. And when they go, they tend to go a couple hours away. And that was the right decision for me at the time, until I made this pretty significant life decision of having grown up in the Midwest having gone to college in the Midwest and never having lived anywhere other than the Midwest to going to law school in Charlottesville, which was, like I said, at the time, a very, very big, consequential decision. And it worked out for me. And I imagine that some of you are from that part of the country. And it would work out for you too, I assure you.

I guess probably the single biggest reason I made that decision-- and I think this is also relevant, I hope, to some of you. Again, I didn't have any lawyers in my family. I didn't really know any lawyers when I applied to law school.

And I wanted to go to a very good school. I wanted to go to a place that I would be challenged. And I was certainly challenged far more than I had been anything previous to that in my life.

But I remember having a very serious discussion with myself that I don't just want to go somewhere that I'll be glad to have gone. I want to go somewhere where I will enjoy the experience. And that doesn't mean it's a nonstop party or social event, but I want to enjoy the experience of being in law school.

And some people have mentioned what's so interesting about-- one of things I love about this event-- and I've usually done this event in person for most of the last 10 years-- it's just wild that year after year after year I've spoken to people at this event, and they've said fundamentally similar things, which is incredible because it happens over the course of 10 or more years, and these are all different people who don't know each other. And they yet say astonishingly similar things year after year.

And what they say year after year is, I wanted to go someplace that I would actually enjoy law school, not a place that I would be glad I went to in retrospect. Because here's a secret: virtually everybody who goes to a fancy law school in retrospect is glad that they went there. So that's not the relevant question that I tend to find.

I think one of the nearly unique selling propositions of this law school is that if you ask alums, did you enjoy law school-- not are you glad you went there, did you enjoy law school? There are very, very few places that people will consistently say yes to that question. And UVA is one of the very small number of places that people will consistently say yes.

Or even a harder one-- if you get people in the medium stage of their professional careers, if you would say, if you could go back to being in law school right now, would you do it? And most people will ultimately say no. But I guess what I would say is grads of this law school will often think about it. They will spend a moment contemplating what their answer to that question is in a way that is not my experience with many other graduates of many other law schools.

And I think the reason for that-- it goes back to those admitted students events that I was talking about. I think this is whatever the opposite of a vicious circle or cycle-- I can never remember which of those two it is. It's because the school has this culture and it has this reputation that it attracts people who value that about it. And then, having gone in part because they value it, folks who are attracted by that are then committed to maintaining it. And that's why I think it's the opposite of whatever the bad thing is. This is a good thing.

And the same thing is not just true for students. I think it's true for faculty too. Because as a person who's been both a student and a faculty member, the faculty members are also A, as a group, very happy, and B, very committed to having a positive institutional culture. And I think the same thing is true there, that from a faculty perspective, the school is attractive to people who care about that. And it leads to people staying who care about that.

I think the same thing is true of the administration. I think the same thing is true in the alums. I think it has a really unique identity in a way that's actually pretty unique for grad schools to have a very distinctive identity.

That doesn't mean the identity doesn't change. That doesn't mean the identity isn't perfect. And that doesn't mean the identity can't get better and more inclusive, and it needs to be.

As the old person on this group, I can tell you the law school is different than it was 20 years ago, and almost universally for the good. It is less mono virtually everything. It is less uniform in virtually every respect in ways that are good. I don't think it was ever distinctly regional-- I came from the Midwest. I don't think I felt like it was distinctly Southern when I was in law school. But I think it feels even less distinctively that than it did when I was in law school as a person who's been around the faculty.

It has an incredible history. It has an incredible tradition. But it's also changed. And I think it's almost uniformly changed for the better.

Obviously, I probably think that. I did not perceive that I was going to live in Charlottesville. I'm actually speaking to you from my attic in Charlottesville. I certainly didn't think when I came here for what I thought was going to be maybe a three-year trip to the East Coast before going back home, that I would end up basically living here for basically the rest of my life. But it just sort of happened. And that happens to a lot of people.

So it's so great to be here with all of you today. I hope you all realize that you've almost certainly got some great decisions that you've got to make. And look forward to talking to you about anything you want to talk about.

**LAURA  
HOWELL:**

Thank you all very much. So a couple of you have actually touched on a couple of the questions that we got from some of our admits. But if you don't mind repeating yourselves a little bit, one thing that they were really curious to know more about was, did you know what kind of law that you wanted to practice, the kinds of things you wanted to do after graduation? Or did UVA help you figure that out in some way? I don't have a preference for who goes first, if you guys want to interchange with each other.

**ERIN  
SEAGEARS:**

I can lead us off again. That's fine. I realized too, I forgot to mention where I'm from. So I was born in Maryland but I've lived pretty much in Virginia and northern Virginia most of my life. And I went to UVA for undergrad, so I'm actually a double Hoo and also a very big fan of Charlottesville. I guess it's not too odd that I'm wearing orange. Orange and Navy all day every day.

But to answer your question, like I mentioned, I did come into law school knowing that I wanted to help children in need, that I want to do juvenile justice in some way. But once again, I had very little experience with the law. And I honestly didn't have many thoughts in terms of what actual jobs-- what type of legal jobs help children. And so I was very open coming into law school. And it was through the many experiences I had at UVA that led me to where I am now, which is the hope to be a juvenile public defender.

So a few of those experiences I had at UVA Law include taking some classes. I took a juvenile justice class with Professor Shin who now leads the Juvenile Justice Clinic at the law school. And that was helpful to learn what type of jobs there are there. I spent every spring break in law school doing pro bono through Alternative Spring Break. And that was incredibly helpful for me just to be able to spend one week in a public service office to see different types of positions that helped children. And I really got a good feel for different offices and different jobs and where I thought would be a good fit for myself.

And then finally, the most important thing that helped me figure out that I want to be a juvenile public defender specifically was my 2L summer. I spent it at the Office of the Public Defender's Office in Baltimore, Maryland. And they have a specific juvenile division, which is pretty unique that they have a division there that specialized in juvenile public defense. And that summer there really solidified for me that that is exactly what I want to do. And that's why I'm clerking in the circuit court in Baltimore City right now because of the summer.

And the last thing I'll add, though, is that the community at UVA Law actually was really helpful to figure that out. And the whole reason why I ended up doing my 2L summer there in Baltimore was because I had a friend at law school who also hoping to do juvenile justice who spent her 1L summer there. And so she told me about her experience and how amazing that office was. And that's why I applied there. That's why I went there. And that's why I'm here in Baltimore right now.

So kind of a combination of the many experiences I was able to have here at the law school and the community here, both my peers and Professor Shin, one of my mentors here.

**GRACE FU:** Yeah. So I touched on this a little bit. I think I probably had a different approach than many of my classmates did. I think a lot of my classmates had no idea what they wanted to do after law school. I came in with some idea.

And I think what I did with that is really focused myself. I said, I think this is what I want to do. Let me try to do all the things I think I need to get out of law school to see if it is the right decision for me.

So I took accounting and finance. I took mergers and acquisitions. I took every kind of business related class I could take at UVA Law School. And I took a lot of other-- and I can't remember what they're called, but the evening courses with the adjunct professors. I think I had a professor who was executive at Coca-Cola. I had a professor who was a managing director at Morgan Stanley, and he flew down every week to teach our class. And it really solidified my decision. And I think that was really helpful for me coming out.

But what I would say is that I'm also grateful during that time that I had that clear idea of what I wanted to do but then gave myself room to do some other things too that I thought were just interesting. So I said, look, I know this is what I want to get out of law school. But I don't want to just have done corporate law for three years. And actually, I probably would have hated it if I only did corporate law for three years.

I took a bunch of other what I would say are random courses because I just thought it was interesting to learn. So I took environmental law. Do I practice environmental law? No. But I thought it was an interesting course. And I thought that the professor at the time was very well liked. And I thought, I'm going to try this out.

And actually, that was a really good strategy for me because, while I did start out as a corporate lawyer, when I went in-house, I actually had to do all sorts of different kinds of law. I practice everything from being a corporate lawyer to litigation to tax to IP. So I'm really glad, actually, that my experience at UVA was somewhat well rounded because it really did, I think, prepare me for in-house practice, which came later, many years after I graduated.

But I would say as advice to all of you, even if you know or you think what you want to do at law school and after law school, take a variety of courses. It maybe the last time you really get to stretch your mind and do something that's fun. And you never know, it could be something that is helpful to you later on down the road, as it was for me.

**DANIEL BRESS:** Well, I'll go next. And I'll say I did not know what I wanted to do when I went to law school. I used law school more as a way to try to figure that out. And what happened was I found out that I actually pretty much liked everything. There was no class that I took that was uninteresting to me.

A big difference I found when I was at the law school was the faculty was very accessible. I was not someone in undergrad who would go into office hours or to take a professor out to lunch. That was just not who I was at that time. For reasons that I really credit UVA more than myself, it was the environment there that encouraged me to come out of my shell a little bit more and to have those interactions with faculty.

Those were life changing for me, not only just in discussions about the law. I find that just talking about the law is such a helpful thing to do when you're trying to learn it. That's why sometimes when I want to talk about a case with my law clerks, I say, just put the books and the computer and the laptop down. Let's just come in and talk about this. That was what law school was with my peers and with faculty.

I found myself drawn to a lot of classes that had to do with, in some way or another, the structure and functioning of American government and constitutional law. I just found those interesting classes and how to interpret legal texts, how to interpret the Constitution, administrative law, separation of powers, foreign relations law. I was intrigued by those. And I found them fun to study. But then I took so many other classes that were-- corporations. I just found it, again, very enjoyable. Property law.

When I went to a law firm, I didn't specialize at all. I spent my entire legal career not specializing. People would ask, what do you specialize in? I would say, I specialize in being a generalist, because the thing I most loved about law school was that there was no boundaries on this. And in some ways, maybe, I lucked out because now I have no specialty at all. I just have to deal with what comes in the door. And in many ways, it reminds me so much of being at the law school because it's constantly intellectually exhilarating.

I wouldn't worry if you don't know what you want to do. And I tell my law clerks that. And I would say the same thing to someone who's been practicing law for 10 years. Careers change dramatically. They're not going to-- this is not like the old days where you could go to a law firm and spend your entire career there. That's very rare to do that-- or to any company or to any government agency. It's extremely rare to do that.

That's one of the exciting things about being a lawyer is that there are so many different chapters in one's career. So don't worry if you haven't figured that out. If you have a great passion, you can pursue it. But I also tell people to be prepared for the unexpected. Be ready to find that you like something that you didn't think you would like. And UVA really gives you the ability to pursue that if it comes to you.

**TOBY HEYTENS:** To the extent I had any clear thought, I thought I was going to be a trial lawyer. And it wasn't until 19 years after I graduated from law school that I did a single appearance in a trial court. I now have since, in the last year and a half. But for 19 years after I graduated from law school, I never did.

If you have a plan and that's that ends up being what you want to do, that's great. There's nothing wrong with that. But if you don't, that's fine too.

**LAURA HOWELL:** I actually want to loop back because all of you guys have touched on classes as being a defining point for you and helping you sort through what it was that you wanted to do. So I'm really curious to hear-- and someone's asked us in the chat-- what was your favorite class in law school? And we'll go from Erin on back the way that we have been doing because I think that's easiest.

**ERIN SEAGEARS:** OK. Yeah, that's actually a hard question because I can honestly say, like Judge Bress mentioned, I truly enjoyed all the classes. I found them all to be incredibly interesting and just amazing professors. So that is hard.

If I had to narrow it down to my favorite class overall, I think it would be criminal procedure with Professor Harmon. Professor Harmon is just truly one of the most brilliant people that I've ever met and an incredible teacher. Her class, criminal procedure, was I believe at 8:30 in the morning. And I am not a morning person, but I will say I did look forward to waking up even on the Friday morning classes to hear her teach criminal procedure.

And she just also teaches just such passion. It definitely will energize you and get you going for the rest of the day. So I loved that class to this day. One of my favorite classes. And it turned out-- at the time, I didn't know that I want to be a public defender. But now I'm even more grateful for the class because obviously it'll be very helpful for that job.

**GRACE FU:**

I would say there's a couple of classes that stuck out in my mind. I had criminal law with Professor Bonnie. And I didn't go into law school thinking that criminal law would be interesting to me at all, but it was fascinating to me. So that was really a fun experience and one of the first classes I took in law school.

And I actually think about my contracts law class with Professor Cohen a lot now because I see a lot of contracts in my job and in my prior roles. And so I think a lot about those fundamental principles constantly. I actually also taught a contracts law course at Cardozo Law School last year. And those fundamental learnings in my first year of law school have stuck with me. And it's just incredible that you learned something decades before, and they just resonate with you and stick with you.

I would also say that the courses taught by the adjunct professors were really helpful to me. They were just really practical. And those professors really wanted to teach you what they knew about the law. And they told it from their voice.

So I encourage you all, wherever you end up-- and I hope you end up at UVA-- to take some of those courses from practitioners because they're going to show you parts of the law that you may not see in your normal course load. And they're going to talk you through what they do every day. And that could be inspiration or guidance for you as you navigate your career path. And that certainly was helpful for me.

**DANIEL BRESS:** This is a tough one. This is like being asked to say who's your favorite child or something like that. Let me name three. One was First Amendment with Lillian BeVier. And the reason I mention this one is because it was an opportunity to take a class with someone who is a true leader in her field. That's actually true of, I would say, literally every class you could take at UVA. But taking that class and just seeing the enormous wealth of knowledge and thinking she had put into this very complicated area of constitutional law was just a very formative experience.

Tort theory-- torts are basically the law of, I guess you could say liability for personal and property injuries and other types of injuries. I took that with Professor Ken Abraham and Professor Vince Blasi. It was a 10-person discussion section.

And the class would be 2 and 1/2 hours of discussion, which would then seemingly be followed by another two hours of discussion among the students at the law school. Two of them then went on-- three of whom actually went on to become faculty members at UVA Law. And just a great class for thinking theoretically.

And then lastly, I'd mention federal courts with Caleb Nelson. It was I think listed as a four credit class-- five credit class. It should have been a 20 credit class. It was so much about the federal courts. And it was mind blowing. I came away with such an appreciation for so many different areas of our federal judicial system.

And then, for many years, I used to keep on my desktop at work a copy of my federal court's outline that I had from that class. At one time I was back at the law school and I was giving some talk. And I mentioned, I usually-- I still to this day keep a copy of my Caleb Nelson federal courts outline on my work computer. And some student raised his hand and said, that's funny you say that because I keep a copy of your Nelson federal courts outline on my computer as well.

But those are three classes. They've stuck with me. The things I learned in each one of those classes-- sometimes even as I'm doing my job now I'll remember something that we talked about in class so long ago. They were all formative experiences.

And I'll mention too, all professors who I've just maintained great relationships with over the years and who've become friends, something I never could have expected if you had asked me on my first day of law school.

**TOBY HEYTENS:** I guess I'm also going to cheat and take two, one from my first semester-- not just my first semester but actually the first law school class I ever took, as in like literally the first day of class and the first day of law school, which was contracts, which was funny because I did not become-- I was not planning on becoming a deal's lawyer. I have not become a deals person. I've litigated maybe one contract adjacent issue in 20 years.

But it was a class that really challenged me and really forced me to think about things in ways that I had not thought about them before. It was a professor who had a very particular take on the subject. And it was not one that came natural to me at the time, but ended up becoming just monumentally influential in the way that I think about-- I don't just think it's about contracts.

I realized only with the benefit of hindsight, it was a whole way of thinking about the law that was just being applied in the context of contracts that I think was just incredibly, incredibly helpful. It didn't hurt that this person I think is also the best teacher I've ever had in my life at any level of school. So that was also pretty helpful.

The other one was a seminar that I took my third year of law school, which was called Race in the Constitution and American History. And it was a professor who was, at the time, writing a book that didn't get released until years later. And it was basically a constitutional history course with a focus on, I was going to say, racial equality, while also largely racial inequality, throughout constitutional history.

And I was a history major in college. And my great alternative "what would I have done in my life if I hadn't gone to law school" was to get a PhD in history. And so that was just an incredibly interesting, important class that has become all the more resonant with a lot of the things that's been going on in the world recently and a big part of what I'm doing in my job right now, actually. So that was a class that, again, was an amazing class at the time. And it's amazing that it continues to resonate this much after being in law school.

**LAURA HOWELL:** It's amazing how much these classes form what it is that we do and how we think about the things that we do following law school. So one other question that we had was actually about the far side of law school and the back end of that, which is what it is that you're achieving now. So what do you guys think that it was you guys-- and ladies. I'm sorry I keep using "you guys." What do you think that it was about the Virginia Law education specifically that helped you in your careers after Virginia Law in terms of first, placement after Virginia Law, maybe, and then, for those of you who have been out a little while longer, in achieving your career goals?

**ERIN SEAGEARS:** I'll say I am not that far into my career. But I would say, even though I haven't even been out for a year now, my time at UVA Law already has been incredibly impactful for where I am now and where I hope to go. Like I mentioned, I'm in Baltimore right now. And really, that's because of the advice from my peers, advice from my mentors, and just the support I got while at UVA. I was very open to go anywhere in the country, really, to do any type of work that set me up to do juvenile justice and child advocacy work.

But really, what was helpful to help me to determine where I want to go, where would be a good place for me was, as I mentioned before, community, so other friends I had who did this the same type of work who I met at UVA Law, professors that I had who mentored me who themselves do juvenile justice and thought this would be a good place for me for these reasons, and even the Public Service Center who walked beside me from day one and still to this day-- just got to know me and knew the opportunities that would be a good fit for me and helped me to make decisions based on those things. And so I'm very, very grateful for all of those people in my life who have helped me to make this decision and who I know walking beside me as I continue to move forward in my career.

And it really is-- it's just a part of my life. We talk about the UVA Alumni community, but it's not just something we say. Every day I'm talking to someone from my time at UVA-- talking to my friends as they're in their positions and getting feedback from them. And I'm sharing about my experience. And so that is something I value so much and look forward to continue to be a part of my life as I move forward in my career.

**GRACE FU:**

So I would say in terms of placement, UVA Law does an excellent job placing students everywhere and across all different functional areas and career paths. For me, I pretty much was able to interview with every single law firm that I was interested in, as well as many of my peers. So I think that the opportunity to go to a firm, to do a clerkship, to work in public service-- all of those are very, very readily available to UVA Law students.

I think in large part it's because of the law school's ranking. I think that is important to the outside world. I also do think that the outside world sees UVA Law students as-- and I think I mentioned this in the beginning-- just well rounded and able to get along with other people. And that, I think, goes a really long way.

And I certainly found that to be the case when I was going through the interview process as a 1L and 2L, but all throughout my career, in fact. So I've met many people over the last several years since I've graduated. And anybody, whether they went to UVA or didn't, looked at UVA Law School and is like, that must have been a great experience. And it's always the case that when they see that on my resume, that's the first reaction. So that must say something about the experience there because it's not only people who actually went there themselves. It's people who have heard about other people's experiences.

And I think that there is something to be said about that. And I think that has helped me in my career too because when they see UVA Law School on my resume, they know that means something more than that person got a really good education. There is something a little bit special about that person. So I would say those couple of things.

And then another thing I just wanted to touch on, which I think is very important and something I think about a lot in my role now, is the importance of ethics as a practitioner of law and UVA. The honor code, being a good person, respecting others-- I think that came up earlier. That's a big part of the UVA Law fabric. And I think that goes a really, really long way in the profession of law.

And I would say that almost every role that I've interviewed for as in-house lawyer, they've asked about how strong your ethics are. And that's not something that comes across in many contexts. But I think that's something that UVA Law takes very, very seriously and something that I feel proud of saying is part of my background because I think that was something that was very, very well ingrained in us at UVA Law School. So I just wanted to [INAUDIBLE]

**DANIEL BRESS:** I'll just pick up on those really powerful comments by Grace. I feel like I've seen UVA from a lot of different angles. I was a student there. I was coming out of there and trying to figure out what I wanted to do. Then I found myself, many years later, a law firm partner, trying to hire people to come work with me and to help me build my law practice. And now I find myself looking for young, talented lawyers who are wanting to come out and do a clerkship.

And there's a real continuity across all of this, which is-- to me, it's a few things. One is the real culture of connectedness. I think there's a real willingness of people to help each other out. That tone, I think, is set ultimately by the faculty and the dean. And I've seen that across multiple-- all the deans I have seen at UVA all share that culture. And the same is true of the faculty.

You hear that expression, tone from the top. That to me bleeds through the rest of the entire institution and the alumni base. There are so many times where I would go to UVA, go to admitted students weekend, give a talk, go back to my-- go back to my law office the next week, and have a couple of emails from people who were students just wanting to ask questions about the law school. And I had calls with these people.

And then I followed them. They would then go to the law school. And they would then go on and become lawyers. And then some number of years later, I would find myself interviewing them to come work at my law firm. And that continuity was just incredible to me.

I think that there are always inflection points in your lives and in your careers. And you heard all about the resumes of all the people on this call. What you don't have is all the things that didn't work out. And there are lots of times it doesn't work out. There are a lot of dead ends. And who do you call when you have a question? Or who do you call when you need help? If you're a client, who do you call when you need a lawyer?

And for me, it was always somebody who had some connection to UVA because I valued their judgment, and I knew that they approached this profession in a way similar to me, based on our common training and the values of the institution. And so I'm sure that's true of a lot of other places. I can't speak to them because I didn't go there.

But what I can say in the case of UVA is that, if you were a lawyer and you were in a case and you met somebody on the other side of the case and you shook hands and you asked-- you're just talking, where'd you go to law school? It was almost like there was a secret shared understanding that although you were adversaries, really, you were ultimately friends. And I think that culture of fellowship is what makes this a very distinctive law school. And for those of us who are alums, we feel very connected to it even long after we've left and even if we're on the other side of the country.

**TOBY HEYTENS:** Yeah. Let me, for my last, just give a very specific example. Again, I'm not somebody who-- I went straight through. And I spent the last 20 years of my life trying to convince people they shouldn't do that. But I did it. And it worked out fine for me.

But look, I did quite well my first semester of law school. But that was not inevitable. And that was not obvious. And let me close, I guess, with an example that has stuck with me more than 20 years later.

It was a couple of nights before one of my fall semester 1L finals. And this was the class that was just not clicking with me all semester long. All semester long I was not at all clicking with it. And there was a major topic in that class, a big, big, big topic in that class.

But either the night or two nights before the exam, there were two other 1Ls, probably my two closest friends my first year, where I basically said to them, I do not understand this topic. And I need you to explain it to me. And when I say I need you to explain it to me, I don't mean I have some questions on the margins about this topic. I fundamentally don't understand this topic at all. I need you to start over at the beginning of this entire topic because I just don't get it at all.

And they did that for me. They spent more than an hour a day or two before their own final their 1L explaining to me from bottom up this topic. And that topic was on the exam. And I must have done at least reasonably well because I did well-- I did well overall the exam, so I must have done it reasonably well on that topic.

And that's just always struck with me. People give examples about people help each other, they support each other. And that's absolutely true. And I can imagine folks in your situation sometimes are like, OK, but everyone says that. What does that mean? Well, that's a really tangible example.

Two people who also-- here's the reality. They were in the same class as me. They were on the same curve as me. In some ways, from a really cynical perspective, me doing poorly in that class would have been better for them in a way. And they took the time right before what was going to be a really stressful and important day for them to help me out in a very tangible way. And it is something that I have never forgotten. And I think it's emblematic of a lot of the culture stuff we've been talking about.

**LAURA**

Thank you for sharing that with us and for sharing your time and your experiences more generally with us today.

**HOWELL:**

We really appreciate it and are so thankful to hear. I know I for one am very glad to hear that my experience at UVA back when I was here tracks with everything that you've been saying-- the caliber of person that you encounter at this law school, which we-- as Judge Bress said, we can't vouch for other law schools. But the caliber of person that you encounter here is something that impacts your career from day one, everything from a grade in a class all the way to your ability to get along with the opposing counsel in a case years later.