

## Feature



Law students  
Fe Lopez (left) and  
Nilly Park relaxing at  
Sullivan Hall.

“We are so grateful for the support provided to advance the work being done by Seattle University School of Law to educate leaders for a more just and humane world. Without asking for credit, this donor helps us live out our mission to educate lawyers who are dedicated to the service of justice.”

—Dean Kellye Testy

# Giving students a voice

## Anonymous donor bolsters Alternative Admission Program

**N**illy Park and her family fled their native Iran fearing religious persecution when she was 14 and eventually received asylum in the United States. Her parents were past working age, so Park and her sisters bore the responsibility for supporting the family and navigating the social service system.

“We came here with \$500 and a couple of suitcases,” said Park, a 3L at SU School of Law. “My parents really gave up a lot for us.”

Though she didn’t learn English until just before she started her freshman year in high school, Park graduated in the top 10 percent of her class. She put herself through college while supporting her elderly parents.

“It was a struggle,” she said.

Park never told her story, even to friends, until she wrote about it in her law school application 10 years after graduating from University of Washington. Her application drew the attention of the Alternative Admission Program, and Park enrolled at SU School of Law, where she has flourished.

“Law school was something I always wanted to do,” she said. “And it really changed my life. Law school has given me a voice I didn’t have, that my family didn’t have in Iran.”

Park is just one of dozens of students who have benefited from the generosity of an anonymous donor committed to providing access to legal education. In the past six years, this donor has created an endowment of \$3.5 million and provided scholarships for many talented law students who are involved with the law school’s Academic Resource Center (ARC). The most recent gifts \$1 million for the endowment and \$60,000 for current scholarships.

“I don’t even know how to say ‘thank you’ enough,” said Fe Lopez, a third-year student and ARC Scholar. “It really is a gift.”

Lopez, who among her activities is the first Latina president of the Student Bar Association, has already accepted a position as a King County deputy prosecutor for the fall. She grew up in Grandview, Wash., where her parents started out as migrant farm workers before pursuing education and encouraging their children to do so as well.

“I never knew anyone who went to law school,” said Lopez, who as a child dreamed about making a difference. “But my parents never let me doubt I was going to college.”

Lopez also is involved in the Latino/a Law Student Association, which among other things works to introduce the legal profession to teens. She was among those who visited schools in the Yakima Valley to talk to Hispanic teens about opportunities available to them after high school.

The Alternative Admission Program allows a number of promising students who don’t meet standard admission requirements to be admitted to the law school. They attend an intensive seven-week summer program that integrates a traditional criminal law course with legal writing and study skills.

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—Fe Lopez 2L

“I enjoyed every minute of criminal law that first summer,” said 2L Brian Payne. “The focus on alternative learning techniques was especially useful. The diverse backgrounds of the ARC students provides a more accurate reflection of the world that many lawyers will work in.”

Payne had been out of college for 12 years, having served in the Peace Corps in Guatemala and as a ranger at Yellowstone National Park. He was welcomed into the Alternative Admission Program.

“The ARC program recognized the value of my experience, and I’m very grateful for the opportunity to attend law school,” said Payne, who spent six weeks of the summer working in the legal clinic of the University of Central America in Managua and hopes to work in the public service field in environmental law. “The ARC program made my dream of law school a reality.”

Students admitted through the alternative program are supported throughout law school by the Academic Resource Center. ARC’s primary purpose is to help diverse and non-traditional students adjust,

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succeed and excel in law school. It also contributes to a more diverse legal profession. In the fall, ARC students have access to resources to keep them on track. The center also helps non-ARC law students referred by professors for support.

“A lot of the students in the program are the first in their families to go to college, and many have economic need,” said Professor Paula Lustbader, director of the Academic Resource Center. “What the endowment means is they have a lighter economic burden and graduate less in debt. And more importantly, it tells these students that people believe in them and want them in the legal profession.”

The endowment provides scholarships ranging from \$2,000 - 5,000 to about 40 percent of all students in the program.

Statistics show the program is meeting its goal of helping diverse students excel. In fact, two ARC students were faculty scholars, one graduated number one in his class, and sev-

eral graduated in the top 20 percent of their class. In addition, ARC students have made significant contributions to the law school community by serving on student committees and participating in student government.

They have gone on to great success after graduation. “Our 550 alums are doing amazing things, and they are people who would not have been admitted into law school without this program,” Lustbader said. Among them are a county prosecutor, a Superior Court judge, federal court clerks and lawyers working in both the public and private sectors.

“This donor believes strongly in the work being done by the Academic Resource Center and is committed to ensuring access to legal education,” Dean Kellye Testy said. “We are so grateful for the support provided to advance the work being done by Seattle University School of Law to educate leaders for a more just and humane world. Without asking for credit, this donor helps us live out our mis-

sion to educate lawyers who are dedicated to the service of justice.”

The students themselves are the best evidence of success. Park has worked as a translator with the Access to Justice Institute and received the Washington Women Lawyer Scholarship this year. She coauthored an article, “Mayday Payday: Can Corporate Social Responsibility Save Payday Lenders?” that was published in Rutgers Journal of Law & Urban Policy.

Park will clerk in the fall for King County Superior Court Judge Mary Yu.

She hopes to work in business law, finding ways to make businesses more responsible to the environment and the community. She also plans to do pro bono work, specifically working with immigrants.

“It’s important to know people are out there struggling, and in whatever way, you can help,” she said. “I feel like I have that power now, that I can do something.”