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## Empowered Advocacy

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# EMPOWERED *advocacy*

*A generous donation is empowering law students to become leaders and elevating the UGA School of Law.*

BY AARON HALE MA '16

**T**HINK OF AN ELECTRIC BILL AFTER A scorching July in Athens, Georgia. Now think of a January heating bill for an old home in Buffalo, New York. That's the kind of financial burden Kate Howard AB '05, JD '17 was helping ease for low-income Buffalonians a few years ago. Through the nonprofit PUSH Buffalo program, Howard helped economically distressed communities find grants to weatherize their homes—retrofitting older buildings to become more energy efficient and to lower heating bills. Before that, she was recruiting volunteers to advocate for people with developmental disabilities through Citizen Advocacy Athens-Clarke. Simply put, Howard is committed to helping society's most vulnerable overcome tough challenges.

That spirit brought Howard back to UGA in 2014 to attend the UGA School of Law, where she focused on indigent criminal defense. The self-described "softie" gets tough when it comes to championing the cause of the vulnerable facing the powerful criminal justice system.

"I kind of like standing up and fighting," she says. "In my personal life, I tend to be soft-spoken and polite. Challenging authority doesn't seem like something I would like. But in the public defense world, that's just doing your job."

In May, Howard graduated at the top of her law school class and was the first Alston Distinguished Law Fellow to receive her degree. Howard and two current law school students, Taryn Winston and Lindsey Bunting, were the inaugural Fellows for the program, which was established in 2016 through a \$2 million gift from The John N. Goddard Foundation.

In its first year, the program offered three law school students a full-tuition scholarship plus a stipend for professional development experiences and opportunities to meet distinguished alumni and some of the

nation's top legal leaders.

As it grows and reaches more students, the program will boost recruiting for "academically excellent" students and elevate the national reputation of the law school, says Peter B. "Bo" Rutledge, dean of the law school. The Distinguished Law Fellows program is modeled after the university's prestigious Foundation Fellows program for undergraduate students, and Rutledge envisions it will have a similar impact on the law school.

*"Challenging authority doesn't seem like something I would like. But in the public defense world, that's just doing your job."*

*—Kate Howard*

"Just as the Foundation Fellows program for undergraduates has helped attract many of our nation's most outstanding college-bound students to UGA, this gift from the Goddard Foundation is transformational for the law school in terms of its ability to attract the kind of student who will go on to have an impact on society and will be an ambassador for the law school."

Already Howard has become such an ambassador. After taking the bar exam this summer, she began clerking for Judge Jill A. Pryor, a federal judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, where Howard is learning the intricacies of appellate court.



A \$2 million gift from The John N. Goddard Foundation is giving the inaugural class of Alston Distinguished Law Fellows (clockwise from top left): Lindsey Bunting AB '16, Kate Howard AB '05, JD '17, and Taryn Winston AB, ABJ '15 unmatched opportunities to explore how they can use the law to make a difference in others' lives.

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*—Peter B. "Bo" Rutledge, dean of the law school*





PETER FREY



PETER FREY



TERRY ALLEN PHOTOGRAPHY

## LEARNING THE ROPES

Lindsey Bunting AB '16 was keeping her options open. While finishing her undergraduate degree, double-majoring in criminology and social justice, she applied to 14 different law schools.

"Georgia had been my goal when I decided to go to law school," she says. "I was advised to cast a wide net and to see what happened with scholarships."

She was considering an offer from Harvard Law School and others in April 2016 when Dean Rutledge told her she would be named an Alston Distinguished Law Fellow. She canceled plans to visit other campuses, declined outstanding offers, and committed to UGA.

Starting the program, though, she had not decided on an area of study. The variety of fields a law school student can take is overwhelming. That's where the fellowship has been particularly helpful for Bunting.

"Coming in, I didn't know the finer

*"Coming in, I didn't know the finer details of law school or becoming a lawyer. The fellowship offers extra help, support, and advice."*

*—Lindsey Bunting*

details of law school or becoming a lawyer," she says. "The fellowship offers extra help, support, and advice."

As a Fellow, Bunting has found the ear of the dean, the Alston family, and a U.S. Supreme Court justice.

Last fall, Howard, Winston, and Bunting sat down for coffee with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas for a

conversation that was supposed to last 15-30 minutes—but the justice decided to stay a while, and he talked with them for more than an hour and a half. This was in the first few weeks of Bunting's law school career, and Thomas' advice about remaining an independent thinker made an impression.

"That was my favorite experience so far," Bunting says. "He has so much wisdom, and he's very funny. Spending time with him was amazing."

Over the summer, Bunting interned at the Wilbanks Child Endangerment and Sexual Exploitation (CEASE) Clinic, which is housed in the law school. The clinic represents survivors of child sexual abuse. For Bunting, the experience was a meaningful way to spend her summer, but she likely couldn't have taken the unpaid position without the professional development stipend offered by the fellowship.

## FINDING HER VOICE

Third-year law student Taryn Winston AB, ABJ '15 has all the qualities to become a leader in her profession. With an attention to detail, she's an outstanding student and involved in law school activities. She's a Dean's Ambassador and is the executive online editor for the *Georgia Law Review*. But before law school, she was uncomfortable speaking in front of groups.

Fellows are destined for great things, which in time will reward the law school and its benefactors for their investment.

"Think of them as trailblazers who advance the national reputation of the institution," Rutledge says.

As these highly qualified and deeply connected Fellows graduate and enter the workforce, they raise Georgia Law's

*"My advocacy experiences have been my favorite parts of law school. They pushed me in ways I didn't expect, and I realized it's something that I'm really passionate about."—Taryn Winston*

"I had ruled out a career in litigation because of my fear of public speaking," she says.

Georgia Law helped Winston find her voice.

Last year, Winston joined moot court, which gives law students experience drafting briefs and presenting oral arguments for hypothetical cases in front of federal and state judges in local, regional, and national competitions. In time, that fear of public speaking gave way to the thrill of competition in advocacy.

"My advocacy experiences have been my favorite parts of law school. They pushed me in ways I didn't expect, and I realized it's something that I'm really passionate about."

Over the summer, Winston interned with two law firms: Covington & Burling LLP in Washington, D.C., which focuses on government and regulatory work, and Bondurant Mixson & Elmore, a boutique litigation firm in Atlanta. Through her Fellowship, she begins a constitutional law research project this fall. After Winston graduates in May, she plans to clerk for U.S. District Judge Steve Jones JD '88 for two years and then possibly work for a large law firm.

Regardless of where she lands, Dean Rutledge believes Winston and the other

reputation among employers, coworkers, and clients.

"That will enhance their impression of the kind of student this law school produces, which will enhance the likelihood they will come back to the law school when hiring," the dean says.

That impact will only multiply as the list of Distinguished Law Fellows grows. The law school named Sam Hatcher, a graduate of Dartmouth College, the incoming Alston Distinguished Law Fellow. In an early indication of the catalytic effect of The John N. Goddard Foundation gift, Elizabeth Wilmot AB '17 will become the inaugural Russell Distinguished Law Fellow this fall, thanks to a generous donation from the Richard B. Russell Foundation.

Beyond boosting the law school's reputation, the fellowship program is opening doors for students. With its focus on professional development, the fellowship is offering an advanced phase of legal education so highly qualified students can explore different areas of the law. And it's helping Howard fight for the underprivileged, Bunting explore her passions, and Winston become a formidable advocate. ■



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