

# D.C. dreaming

The dream of practicing law in Washington, D.C., came to UB Law School in the spring semester with a first-of-its-kind Washington Day event. Sponsored by the Office of Career Services, the event brought students – both those on the cusp of beginning their legal careers and those pondering what specialization they should pursue in Law School – face to face with a wide range of alumni who work in the nation's capital. In addition to professional advice, the conversations ran to such practicalities as housing, transportation and social life.

“There is more and more interest from our students in working in Washington,” said James R. Newton, associate dean for national outreach and strategic planning, who organized the program. “And Washington, as the city of government, provides opportunities you cannot find anywhere else.”

Washington Day included panel discussions, a closing cocktail reception, and individual mentoring meetings between students and alumni. “The day was intended to give students an insider’s track on finding a job in D.C., to receive mentoring from those alumni who have had success, and to talk about their potential job search,” Newton said.

Eleven UB Law alumni took part in the event, flying to Buffalo at their own expense. They ranged from government attorneys to private practitioners to those who worked for non-profits or educational institutions.

But despite that diversity, their advice for would-be Washington lawyers was remarkably similar: Work hard, network like crazy, and hope for a little luck.

Said David Koehler ’94: “It can be a little bit difficult, because Buffalo is not as well-known a commodity in Washington as it is in Western New York. So use your contacts; networking is simply the idea of opening the door. It may not happen at the first instance.



Students (left to right) Kirsten A. Lerch ’09, Rachael W. Phelan ’09 and Diane S. Meldrim ’09 speak with Judith B. Ittig ’71.

The key is to be patient, lay the groundwork, and be ready for that moment when it happens.”

“Give yourself the time to get your foot in the door,” advised Jane Mago ’78. “There are lots of what I call starter careers in Washington. It can be a job on Capitol Hill working in one of the congressional offices, or on a committee staff where you learn an area of expertise. It can be a job in one of the federal agencies. Interestingly, it can be a job in one of the law firms.”

There are actions newly minted lawyers can take to increase their chances of finding the right niche,

these alumni said.

“It is really important to develop a specialty, something you know in greater depth than most of the people around,” said Judith Ittig ’71. “People will turn to you for that expertise, and Washington is a good place to develop that.”

Warned Kristin Koehler ’94: “D.C. has more lawyers per capita than any other city in the United States. We have more than 1,300 percent more lawyers than New York, and New York is the second-highest concentration. As a result, there is tremendous competition in the workplace. You have to be com-

## ALUMNI BRING THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE TO WASHINGTON DAY



David Koehler ’94 shares his insights on working in the nation’s capital.



Michael J. Surgalla Jr. ’82, far left; Adam Vodraska ’89, near left, with students at the forum.

mitted, work hard, persevere and use every possible networking opportunity you have, and you have to start now.”

On the bright side, though, said Dave Franasiak ’78: “When things are bad in the country, Washington does well. The way Washington looks now, it is going to look different in five years. It is going to be bigger. The big government of Lyndon Johnson is coming back. There are going to be programs to solve some of these problems, and half of them are not going

to work, and half of them will work but not as they were intended to work, and there are going to be lawyers as thick as thieves every five feet. We are at the beginning of a huge lawyer boom.”

The participating alumni were Leslie Darman ’94, an attorney with the Environmental Protection Agency; Dave Franasiak ’78, CFO and senior partner of Williams & Jensen; Suzanne Hill ’01, director of employment and professional development at the University of Maryland Law School; Judith Ittig ’71, partner in Ittig & Ittig; David Koehler ’94, senior staff

attorney with the Federal Trade Commission; Kristin Koehler ’94, a partner in Sidley Austin; Jane Mago ’78, senior vice president and general counsel for the National Association of Broadcasters; John Simson ’78, executive director of SoundExchange; Mike Surgalla ’82, an attorney with the Department of Justice; Bari Talente ’97, associate vice president for state and local government relations with the National MS Society; and Adam Vodraska ’89, assistant general counsel for information technology with the Government Accountability Office.