



Stellar debut for PLUS Program

{ Maine Law’s new summer immersion program for college undergraduates aims to bring diversity to the legal profession. }

By Trevor Maxwell

A diverse group of college undergraduates – including students from rural Maine and students originally from Afghanistan, Brazil, China, Kenya, and the United Kingdom – were among the 22 participants in the University of Maine School of Law’s first ever summer immersion program for people interested in the law and in the legal profession.

The inaugural DiscoverLaw.org Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars (PLUS) Program was held at Maine Law from May 30 to June 24, 2016.

The program is designed primarily for college students of color, immigrants, low-income students, and students from rural areas, reflecting the ultimate goal of bringing more diversity to the legal profession in Maine and around the country.

Among the participants were:

- A student at Southern Maine Community College who received only two years

of education in her home country of Afghanistan, earned her high school diploma in Portland, and is interested in international law and women’s rights.

- A student at Bowdoin College who grew up in the UK, volunteers with disadvantaged children, and hopes to become a lawyer to help people harmed by poverty.
- A student at the University of Maine at Farmington who has served as an intern for the Franklin County District Attorney’s Office, and who hopes to one day prosecute crimes against humanity at the International Court of Justice.

Maine Law was awarded a \$300,000 grant from the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), DiscoverLaw.org to fund the PLUS Program for three summers. Only 16 other law schools nationwide have been selected to administer the grants since LSAC first offered them in 2002.

The inaugural class was selected from



Kwaku Baah, a Husson University student, gives a presentation during the 2016 PLUS Program at Maine Law.

PLUS Scholars

Get to know some of the students who participated in the Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars (PLUS) Program at Maine Law in the summer of 2016:

Abdi Abdirahman

Age: 22

Hometown: South Portland, Maine

College: University of Southern Maine



About: A political science student at USM, Abdi was born in Somalia, fled with his family to a refugee camp in Kenya, and came to the U.S. when his father obtained a visa in

the late 1990s. Abdi graduated from South Portland High School in 2012, and has been interested for many years in politics and the law. He credits Randy Inosencio, the Jobs for Maine's Graduates specialist at USM, and Steve Byrne, chair of the JMG board of directors, for encouraging him to pursue his dream of becoming a lawyer.

"I have high expectations for myself. My goal is to be the first person in my family to attend graduate school. If you don't go after it, you never know what you could have accomplished." – Abdi Abdirahman

Briana Cardwell

Age: 22

Hometown: Boston, Mass.

College: Bowdoin College



About: Briana is an Africana Studies major and Sociology minor at Bowdoin. She plans to become an immigration and civil rights lawyer, with the ultimate goal of serving as

a Congresswoman. Her father came to the U.S. from Belize, and two of her uncles were deported to Belize when Briana was younger. That experience motivated her to learn about immigration law and to get involved in politics. Briana has worked as an intern for the Boston Chapter of the NAACP, and has volunteered for the Big Sister Association and for the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition.

"I want to humanize people's experiences with immigration law. That has been a forgotten piece in all the debates around immigration policy." – Briana Cardwell

Liya Mindaye

Age: 21

Hometown: Cambridge, Mass.

College: University of Maine at Farmington



About: Liya is a natural helper. She came to the U.S. from Ethiopia when she was 7 years old, and attended schools in Cambridge, Mass. As an undergraduate

in the Rehabilitation Services program at UMF, she is learning how to advocate in a variety of ways for the poor, elderly, children, and people with disabilities. Liya also volunteers at a nursing home and at Mt. Blue Middle School, and is a leader in the Student Senate. She applied for Maine Law's PLUS Program because she is exploring career paths that would give her skills and connections to help more people, and to have an impact on public policy.

"One thing I've enjoyed about the program is that there is no pressure to be right all the time. I also like that we are applying everything that we are being taught. I'm taking it all in and having an open mind." – Liya Mindaye

a pool of more than 100 applicants, with preference given to applicants from Maine. Students received a \$1,000 stipend, meals, and housing at the South Portland campus of Southern Maine Community College.

Real-life applications of the law

The PLUS Program is taught by Maine Law faculty, staff, and teaching assistants. This year's curriculum included an introduction to lawyering, leadership skills, and legal writing as well as visits to courthouses, law firms, the State House, and other destinations. Students also learned professional skills such as cover letter and resumé writing, networking, and inter-

viewing. Four Maine Law students served as peer mentors, and two served as teaching assistants, providing important support to the participants.

Professor Angela Crossman Arey, director of the Legal Writing Program at Maine Law, served as PLUS Program curriculum director. Admissions Coordinator Heidi Gage served as the program director. One of their priorities was to place the students in scenarios where they could see the law in action. Arey and Gage organized trips to a variety of courtroom proceedings, and developed simulations in which the students played different roles in the legal system.

"This program is all about giving stu-

dents the chance to see how law is applied in real life settings, where they can see themselves in the role of lawyer," Arey said.

"Simulations and experiences have the kind of impact that you just can't get from sitting in a classroom. For our PLUS students, the chance to see a prosecutor in action, or a defense lawyer or judge, is an experience that will motivate them to pursue a career in law."

Students observed arraignments at Portland District Court. Judge Keith Powers, '73, helped coordinate that visit. District Court Judge E. Mary Kelly and Superior Court Justice Paul Fritzsche, '75, took time to speak to students during breaks in the proceedings.

The group also traveled to Lewiston District Court to observe the Protection From Abuse docket. Judge Rick Lawrence helped arrange the visit. Lawrence, a graduate of Harvard Law School, was nominated to the bench by Gov. Angus King in 2000, becoming the first black judge in Maine history. While in Lewiston, the PLUS students also met privately with Judge John Beliveau.

Briana Cardwell, a 22-year-old Boston native who is entering her senior year at Bowdoin College, said the experiential components of the PLUS Program helped to cement her decision to attend law school.

“It makes me feel that I’m on the right track. I’m getting ahead of the game by learning about the law while I’m still an undergraduate,” Cardwell said. She is especially interested in immigration law, civil rights law, and politics.

Meeting Maine’s Attorney General

A highlight of the program was a day-long trip to Augusta on June 8. At the recently opened Capital Judicial Center, students observed oral arguments in two cases being heard by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court. After the hearings, they spoke with the lawyers who represented the parties.

Students also had an opportunity to speak with Janet Mills, Maine’s Attorney General, who was attending one of the hearings. Mills, a 1976 graduate of Maine Law, was generous with her time and encouraged the students to ask questions.

The group also toured the State House and the Cross State Office Building, where they met with Maine Law alumnus Michael O’Brien, ’14, who works as an analyst for the Legislature’s Office of Policy and Legal Analysis. O’Brien said he enjoyed his role in the legislative process – advising lawmakers on the creation of bills that sometimes become law. He told the students that they can have an impact on society as lawyers, lawmakers, or in other avenues for advocacy.



John Gulliver, a senior partner at Pierce Atwood LLP, speaks to PLUS scholars at a reception hosted by the firm at its Portland headquarters.

At the end of his talk, O’Brien recalled moving to Maine in August of 2011 to start law school. He didn’t know anyone in the state and was living in a tent at a campground.

“You don’t need connections to succeed. I was totally welcomed into Portland by the community,” he said. “You don’t need to be a generational Mainer to do good work and land a job that is exciting and meaningful.”

‘This is a game-changer’

For the undergraduate students who participate – no matter if they pursue a law degree or other interests – the PLUS Program presents an opportunity to learn about the vital role the law plays in maintaining a civilized society, said Danielle Conway, Dean at Maine Law.

Intelligent, ethical lawyers will always be needed, Conway said, in government, public interest law, the non-profit and social justice sectors, and in a wide range of other career tracks.

“This is a game-changer,” Conway said. “As the public law school for Maine, and the only law school in the state, Maine



Lijie “Reggie” Huang, a Colby College student, speaks during a PLUS Program class.

Law is guided by a longstanding commitment to diversity and public service. This program helps us put those values into action.”

“By encouraging young people from diverse backgrounds to explore careers in law, and by providing skills training to them at this point in their lives, we can open pathways they might have never considered or thought possible.” **ML**

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– Maine Law Dean Danielle Conway