

OPENING ARGUMENTS: **Aria Eee '94**

Executive Director, Maine Board of Overseers of the Bar

What is your pre-Maine Law background?

I'm a first-generation college graduate. I graduated from the University of Alabama, and then I took a year off to work before moving to Maine sight unseen. I drove a moving truck with my Mustang, cat, and wolf-hybrid in tow.

Aria Eee is the executive director of the Maine Board of Overseers of the Bar. She has devoted nearly 25 years of her legal career to public service in the state of Maine, and she is the 2020 recipient of the Law School's L. Kinvin Wroth Distinguished Alumna/us Award.

Why did you choose Maine Law?

I was bartending in Alabama, and a friend showed me a calendar full of photos of Maine. She said, "Look how beautiful it is!" That was my inspiration for moving halfway across the country; and when I decided to go to law school, I chose Maine Law because I loved living here.

I almost dropped out after the first year – I felt out of place and in over my head. Deirdre Smith, my classmate and friend, talked me out of it and encouraged me to try for a spot in the Clinic. That's where everything finally came together and started to make sense. It's where I learned to be in court, to actually practice law – and I loved it. At last I was able to say, "Now I know why I went to law school!"

What is involved in your current work?

As of mid-June 2020, the Court and Board made me executive director of the Board of Overseers of the Bar. I'm responsible for organizing the educational initiatives, daily office management, and executive functions for the Board.

Was there a particular Maine Law faculty member who influenced you?

David Gregory was just amazing. I felt a little lost and confused early on, but he was a wonderful advisor. His class may have been the only one I truly understood that first year!

What surprised you most about life after law school?

My first job out of law school was as a NAPIL fellow (now known as Equal Justice Works), providing Indian legal services to Passamaquoddy Tribal members in Washington County. I was surprised and honored to receive the fellowship and really loved serving as a PTLA attorney!

I'm continually surprised that I'm able to maintain friendships and relationships I've had since law school. Maine has a small legal community that's incredibly accessible and supportive. I moved around a lot as a kid, so to be able to feel solidly connected to friends and colleagues all these years is great. Making and keeping strong relationships can really sustain your practice and help keep up your stamina.

Why should students consider Maine Law?

For the same reasons I did – although maybe not just because of the lighthouses! Maine Law's small size offers an amazing opportunity for individualized programs. Particularly in the Clinic and in seminars, the faculty members take a genuine interest in you. As a student you can feel that, and it buoys you to do a good job. I never ever felt like a number at Maine Law. As one of just a few students of color in my class, I also felt it was a truly supportive environment.

In what ways has the COVID-19 crisis affected your work?

Nearly everyone is struggling right now, including recent graduates who are uncertain about their futures. I've focused energy on ensuring that the Board of Overseers is a ready resource for both bar members and Maine legal consumers.

This has also proven to be an important time for our Bar to address systemic racism, inequitable treatment, and the need for more inclusive efforts. It's a valuable opportunity to reflect on how to contribute more to our legal and local communities. To do so, I think we must work hard to create safe spaces within which to discuss these challenging topics. Creating openings for meaningful discussion seems to me to be the most productive vehicle to affect lasting changes.



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