

# What I'm Doing with My LAW DEGREE

By Alexander Gelfand

The notion that a law degree can serve as a launching pad for any number of careers has become something of a cliché. But that doesn't mean it isn't true, or that the range of available career options isn't exceptionally broad.

In this article, we profile four alumni who are using their law degree to chart their own course.



**“That’s the wonderful part about building your career. There are so many different paths you can take.”**

— Ave Bie '90

“That’s the wonderful part about building your career,” says **Ave Bie '90**. “There are so many different paths you can take.”

Bie herself has pursued several different career paths, at times simultaneously. A former public servant who ran several state agencies and regulated Wisconsin’s public utilities, Bie is currently a managing partner and member of the public utilities practice in the Madison offices of Quarles & Brady, LLP. She also juggles a plethora of community and family obligations, serving on the boards of organizations ranging from the Green Bay Packers to the St. Mary’s Foundation, while somehow finding the time to raise two teenage children.

“You learn as you get older to work smart, versus work hard,” Bie says. “If you work smart, you can continue to pursue things that you’re passionate about outside those hours at the office.”

It’s pretty clear that Bie learned to work smart early on. Her family has a long tradition of public service — one great-grandfather was a state

legislator and another was the mayor of Green Bay — and her career ambitions have always been coupled with a desire to serve the broader community. She spent six years as policy director for the Republican Party in the Wisconsin State Assembly before going to law school, and chose UW-Madison in part because it allowed her to enroll part-time while continuing to pursue her career in state government.

That was a good call. Shortly after she began taking classes, her boss in the state legislature, Tommy Thompson '63, J.D.'66, was elected governor, and Bie became his director of appointments. Four years later, just as she was tying up her studies, Bie herself was appointed deputy secretary in the Department of Regulation and Licensing — and got married, to boot.

“The headline in the paper was, ‘Bie Gets a Degree, a Husband, and a Promotion All in One Week,’” she laughs.

Bie subsequently spent eight years as deputy secretary of the Department of Corrections and six

years on the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, the independent body that regulates the state's public utilities.

Throughout her career, Bie has collected board memberships the way some people collect stray animals, including one at the Edgewood Campus School, where her son and daughter attend high school. (She started off on the board of its grade school, a position she acquired when her son asked if she'd serve as a lunchroom mom. "I tell you, hon, I'll do what I can," she told him. Bie approached the school's president, who knew a gift when he saw one; the next day, she was invited to serve on the board.)

Yet as a Green Bay native, Bie was especially pleased to join the Packers' board. In addition to her ongoing work for the Packers' governance subcommittee, Bie spent six years with the Green Bay Packers Foundation, the team's grant-making arm, which funds charitable organizations across the state. (Since its inception in 1986, the foundation has distributed more than \$2 million to civic and charitable groups.)

"That was really rewarding, because you touch charities all over Wisconsin with Packers grants," she says. "It was overwhelming to look at the good deeds that people were doing all over the state. You just see how passionate people are about giving back to the community, and you want to be a part of it. That's what keeps you going on nights when you think, 'I'm just too tired to do something else.'"

That sense of fulfillment — whether it comes from her volunteer efforts, or from continuing to address public policy issues in private practice — is what keeps Bie motivated.



Bie's colleague at Quarles & Brady, former state Commerce Secretary **Cory Nettles '96**, has a similar commitment to community service — and a similar penchant

for expressing it in many and varied ways. Nettles spends a good deal of time running Generation Growth Capital, a private equity fund that generates both investment returns and social returns by providing capital to businesses in low- to middle-income communities across Wisconsin. He is also actively involved with Usher's New Look, a charitable foundation founded by R&B star Usher Raymond.

Nettles joined Quarles & Brady as a litigator in the firm's product liability practice in his hometown of Milwaukee. Six years later, a friend who was considering a run for governor asked Nettles if he would support his campaign. Nettles agreed. The friend was Jim Doyle '67, and once elected, he named Nettles secretary of commerce. Nettles was 32 at the time, and the first African-American to serve in the post.

"I was a fairly young person, and the transition from private practice and the private sector to government was an interesting one," Nettles says. Interesting and successful: as commerce secretary, Nettles handled a number of major initiatives in areas such as banking reform and economic development.

When Nettles left government service in 2005, he returned to Quarles & Brady part time (he's currently of counsel in the corporate services and government relations groups at the firm's Milwaukee office), but he never quite returned to his old life. "I really haven't practiced law in the traditional sense since I left the firm in 2002," Nettles says. Instead, he used the skills and expertise he acquired in government to drive business development and strategic projects for the firm, while launching a series of businesses in areas ranging from IT consulting to real estate development. In 2007, he helped launch Generation Growth, and he has managed the fund ever since.

Generation Growth grew out of an idea that was first presented to



**"It's a wonderful way of leveraging my legal skills, my time in government, my time as an entrepreneur, and my social commitment."**

**— Cory Nettles '96**

Nettles when he was still commerce secretary: a group of institutional investors, some with philanthropic backgrounds, came to him with a plan to combine community and economic development by making for-profit investments with a social mission. Nettles took an immediate liking to the concept, which jibed with his attempts at encouraging economic growth and opportunity in the state.

"We thought that you could do well, and you could do good," he says.

After Nettles left government service, he was invited to join the board of Generation Growth. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to run it. Under his leadership, the fund has backed minority entrepreneurs and businesses in distressed communities, reaping the rewards presented by overlooked opportunities while simultaneously spurring economic development in underserved areas.

"It's a wonderful way of leveraging my legal skills, my time in government,

my time as an entrepreneur, and my social commitment,” Nettles says.

In similar fashion, Usher’s New Look invests in urban and minority youth in communities from New York to Los Angeles. The non-profit foundation offers a variety of training and mentoring programs, requires participants to perform community service, and offers them opportunities for education and travel. As a member of its executive committee, Nettles was instrumental in taking the organization to Milwaukee.

“I remember hearing early on the Biblical injunction, ‘To whom much is given, much is required,’” Nettles says. “I was fortunate enough to have a lot of people invest in me, and that instilled in me a sense of obligation to pay that forward. I could never pay it back, but I can certainly pay it forward. And that’s what I’ve tried to do.”



Like Nettles, **Mark Noel '07** has spent time both in and out of conventional legal practice. And the career path he has followed, though circuitous, has had an internal logic all its own.

Noel spent three years as a litigation associate specializing in intellectual property at Latham & Watkins, LLP, in Washington, D.C. He then founded a startup company to build cloud-based software for electronic document review. And just last year, he became a director in the technology practice at the global business advisory firm FTI Consulting, specializing in the discovery of electronically stored information. But as Noel points out, his interest in science and technology actually predates his interest in the law.

“I’ve been a techie for a long time,” he says.

Family lore has it that by the age of five, Noel was already dismantling his parent’s television to see how it worked. He went on to earn a degree in physics from the Georgia

Institute of Technology while working evenings and weekends as a deputy sheriff in the Atlanta Police Department.

**“What’s the story? Are there smoking guns? What’s in there that the other side is going to surprise me with at deposition?”**

**— Mark Noel '07**

“I was probably the only physics student who carried around a 40-caliber Glock — and the only deputy sheriff who carried around a quantum physics textbook, in case things got slow,” Noel says.

Since the sheriff was reluctant to sign off on Noel’s tuition reimbursement forms without at least one or two courses related to law enforcement, Noel also began picking up credits in psychology.

That unique background led to a seven-year career at Dartmouth College developing computer-driven training programs for organizations such as the Department of Homeland Security. A growing interest in intellectual property and constitutional law led to UW-Madison. And Noel’s subsequent stint as a litigator produced a résumé tailor-made for his current role as an expert on electronic discovery — a discipline whose practitioners use their knowledge of information technology, cognitive psychology, and the law to extract legally significant information from electronic data and present it in ways that litigators and their clients can understand.

At FTI, for example, Noel helps parties to corporate litigation and their lawyers sift through mountains of data. These days, Noel says, it’s not unusual for each side to have 150 to 200 GB worth of digital files, which can easily mean several million documents. “You get to the point where it costs more to do discovery than the



case is worth,” Noel says.

Noel and his team first determine the best e-discovery procedures for a given case based on the particular legal and technical issues involved. They then employ a variety of software tools to extract and organize the most relevant documents for review by flesh-and-blood lawyers.

Those tools include predictive coding software that uses artificial intelligence to identify responsive documents (the software learns to recognize relevant material by digesting input from expert human reviewers, and recent research indicates that it is at least as accurate as human review, albeit far faster); and data visualization software that clusters large batches of similar documents in user-friendly, graphical form. To use them properly, Noel stays current with the latest studies on information storage and retrieval, a field that draws on computer science and cognitive science alike. His primary goal — aside from identifying privileged documents that should stay out of sight — is to help counsel figure out which files in the data pile are significant, and then make sense of them.

“What’s the story? Are there smoking guns? What’s in there that the other side is going to surprise me with at deposition?” Noel asks by way of illustration.

Armed with some very powerful technology and a lot of expertise,

Noel aims to answer questions like those as thoroughly and as quickly as possible.



**Chiann Bao '07** might not share Noel's high-tech pedigree. But the first step she took toward her current position as secretary-general of the Hong Kong International Arbitration Center (HKIAC), the principal hub for international commercial arbitration and dispute resolution in Asia, nonetheless involved a handful of keywords and a web browser.

"Literally, it was a Google search," she says.

Bao was just out of college and working as a legal assistant when she began exploring a possible Fulbright scholarship to Asia. (A fluent Mandarin speaker, she spent her summers as a child visiting her grandparents in Taiwan, and traveled to Beijing while studying policy analysis as an undergraduate at Cornell.) The word *arbitration*



popped up in her search results as a focus of one of the Fulbright programs, and Bao was intrigued. She applied and was awarded the Fulbright, and she later wound up earning a master's degree in arbitration and dispute resolution at the City University of Hong Kong. She went on to work for Neil Kaplan, a respected international arbitrator

with offices in both London and Hong Kong who was also chairman of the HKIAC at the time.

Bao's interest in international arbitration eventually drew her to law school. When she first arrived, however, no one at the UW taught the subject, so Bao took the initiative. In her first year, she recruited a small group of fellow students to compete in the Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot, an arbitral moot court held each year in Vienna and Hong Kong; persuaded various faculty to serve as volunteer judges during practice sessions; and enlisted James Cole, a certified mediator at Quarles & Brady, as a coach.

By Bao's second year, Cole was teaching arbitration as an adjunct (Professor Jason Yackee has since taken over), and Bao and another student were co-coaching the team, which advanced to the semi-finals in Hong Kong and the elimination round in Vienna.

"It put Wisconsin on the map in the international arbitration

Bao is also charged with explaining the benefits of arbitration to potential users, and with advocating for Hong Kong as the best place to pursue it. Since those potential users might be found anywhere, so might Bao. Since joining the HKIAC in 2010 (she previously worked on civil litigation and international arbitration for DLA Piper in New York), she has traveled to Canada, Sweden, the United States, Singapore, South Korea, India, Myanmar, and mainland China.

After returning from Vienna, for example, Bao took a brief holiday in Thailand with her family before departing for the U.S. (Bao's husband, Andrew Meehan '07, works for the Hong Kong office of the New York firm Kobre & Kim; the two have an infant daughter.) She then spent two weeks giving presentations in San Francisco and Washington, D.C., hopping from a seminar on cross-border dispute resolution in China hosted by the Association of Corporate Counsel to the American

**"I love being an advocate for Hong Kong. I get to educate users about arbitration and what we do at the center, and I get to learn about an area of the law that is always interesting to me."**

**— Chiann Bao '07**

world," says Bao, who recently traveled to Austria to serve as a judge in the 19th annual competition, which drew participants from 262 universities scattered across 16 different countries. While she was there, Bao also spoke at a seminar on new developments in arbitration in both Austria and China.

As secretary-general of the HKIAC, she is responsible for overseeing the administration of approximately 600 arbitration cases each year. "In litigation terms, we're the equivalent of a clerk of the court and a process server," Bao says. "We handle all the procedural aspects of an arbitration."

Bar Association's annual dispute-resolution conference.

It all adds up to a fairly demanding schedule, especially for the parent of a young child. Despite some initial anxiety about taking a position so far off the beaten path, Bao has clearly found her niche.

"I love being an advocate for Hong Kong," she says. "I get to educate users about arbitration and what we do at the center, and I get to learn about an area of the law that is always interesting to me."

If only all online searches paid off so handsomely.

