

# UCLA LAW magazine

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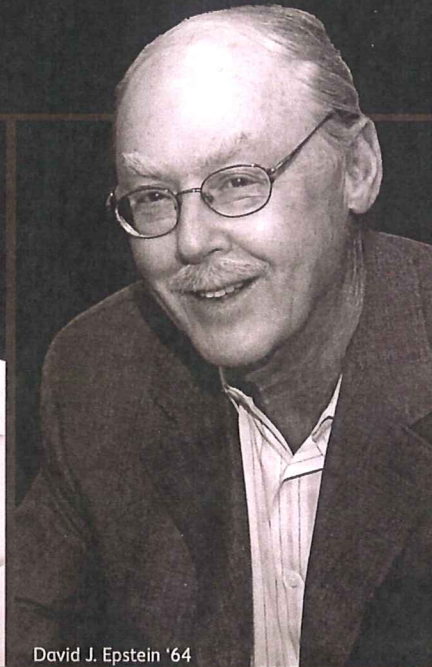
## UCLA LAW Serving the Public Interest



Professor Gary Blasi



Alicia Miñana de Lovelace '87



David J. Epstein '64



Neelum Arya '03

Service

EQUITY

justice

Access  
Advocacy

EMPOWERMENT

family housing discrimination suit against a mobile-home-park company, a racial-coding housing suit, and litigation against the Los Angeles Police Department in which officers were charged with harassing and discriminating against three other officers based on sexual orientation.

An ongoing case that has required a lot of attention is one that alleges international human rights violations by representatives of Chevron Corporation in Nigeria, a suit in which Lauren Teukolsky '00 is a co-counsel.

"There are a lot more private firms doing this kind of work now, so it's a more viable option for law students to consider," Voorhees stays. "But it still demands long hours and the burnout rate is very high, so if you're not doing it for a higher cause it will just eat you up."

### Janeen Steel '99 and Alicia Miñana de Lovelace '87

In high school, Janeen Steel was put in honors class, but was told she was lazy. Feeling disconnected from learning, she lived a life of self-destruction, bottomed out, and after enrolling in community college was finally diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder. Steel was then given accommodations for her learning disability. "I realized that law gave me my life back because it enabled me to get extended time on exams, use of a computer, and books on tape. It gave me time to access my brain."

After being accepted to UCLA Law, Steel applied for and received the UCLA La Raza Alumni Association Cesar Chavez Summer Fellowship to write a learning rights guide for parents of children with learning disabilities. One of the founders of the scholarship was Alicia Miñana de Lovelace, who was impressed with the uniqueness of Steel's project because "it would allow children to receive the proper diagnosis for a learning disability and parents to get information about resources and self advocacy."

Miñana helped the project to grow into the Learning Rights Law Center, which has four attorneys and an advocate, handled 270 cases in 2006, and has had to turn people away because there are not enough attorneys. She chairs the Center's Board of Directors and is one of six UCLA Law alumni involved with the organization, including Ines Kuperschmit '02, the director of legal services and a staff attorney for Public Counsel. A corporate lawyer specializing in small business transactions, Miñana is leading a new satellite of the Center in the South Bay, which plans to engage unemployed attorneys who are mothers as learning rights advocates for children in that community.

"UCLA showed me that you can do well by doing good," says Teukolsky, another graduate of the inaugural class of the Epstein Program. "I love my job, and would like to continue doing this kind of work for as long as I can." Helping to prepare her for work as a trial attorney, she says, was the externship she landed during her first year as a student with Judge Stephen Reinhardt of the U.S. Court of Appeals, 9th Circuit, and later clerkships with Judge Harry Pregerson also of the 9th Circuit Court, and Judge A. Howard Matz of the Central District Court of California.

Teukolsky knew she wanted to be a public interest litigator from the time she was a child, when she read about the Scopes "monkey" trial and watched legal dramas like *Inherit the Wind* and *L.A. Law*. "My heroes were always attorneys and social activists doing social justice work — Clarence Darrow, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King. I wanted to be able to tell a story like they did for my own clients." Teukolsky also had a heightened awareness of discrimination and justice from her parents, who grew up in South Africa under apartheid, and through her own childhood experiences as a member of the only Jewish family in a small farming community outside Ithaca, New York.

In fall 2006, Teukolsky was asked to share her knowledge of public interest law with current public interest students. Together with Cheer, she co-taught a course for the first year workshop, "An Introduction to Public Interest Advocacy." "It was exciting to come back and show them that what they're learning now is important," Teukolsky says. "For instance, I could say 'pay attention to civil procedure because this is how it is used in civil rights cases.' I also brought in other attorneys, many of whom I had met when I was in the program. It was an example of how the program really gives you a sense for the players and organizations that are doing good work, and that networking gives you a leg up when looking for a job."



Neelum Arya '03



Alicia Miñana de Lovelace '87

Neelum Arya '03 knows firsthand how a connection to the Epstein Program can lead to career advancement. In her first year in the program, Arya was profiled in *UCLA Law*. The article was seen by Wendy Aron '96, who recruited Arya to work at the Los Angeles County Juvenile Court that summer.

The center is also reaching out to children in the juvenile justice and foster care systems, whom Steel says are often perceived and treated as disabled when they are not, training parents and probation officers about children's legal rights to an education, and looking to address the needs of homeless, language-challenged and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender youth.

"We're broadening our goals to include others who have difficulty accessing the education system," Steel says. "I feel driven to do this because who else will? I felt really lucky that I got through school. For every kid we touch who has access to education it changes their whole family."

### Meredith Blake '95

Domestic violence was capturing the attention of the public and of Meredith Blake when she was an undergraduate at UC Berkeley in the late '80s and early '90s. In law school, she followed through by volunteering with legal services agencies, policy agencies, and shelters addressing domestic violence, and was a research assistant for Professor Fran Olsen, who specializes in feminist legal theory.

But Blake saw a gap and wanted to fill it. "There were a lot of services for young children and adult women, but not for teenagers and young adults, or any that were preventive and proactive," she says. So in early 1996 Blake founded Break the Cycle, an organization that educates teens and young adults about domestic and dating violence and provides free legal services for victims of such abuse. "When we went national in 2003, it was the pinnacle for me," says Blake. "I love the building process, so it was time to move on."

In 2005, she joined Participant Productions, a socially conscious film production company, and built social action campaigns around its films. One project had former Vice President Al Gore train 1,000 people to present the slide show that's seen in his film, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Earlier this year she started her own non-profit company to develop social action campaigns and strategic impact philanthropy for a variety of clients.

"A lot of what I've done is from the confidence and leadership skills I received in law school," says Blake, who also credits the longtime mentoring of former Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti '67. "I gained an understanding and skills set in advocacy and organizing, the building blocks of social movements."

-- Robin Heffler