

## Giving Back But Getting More

Posted on 10 February 2017 by Ruchi Shah



**Lisa Dewey (Washington, DC) and Ruchi Shah (New York) at the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City**

One morning in April 2015, during my very last class at Harvard Law School, my phone rang with a DC area code. Being the diligent student that I am, I waited until after class to return the call. I soon found myself on the line with Lisa Dewey, pro bono partner at DLA Piper, informing me that I was selected to be a Krantz Fellow during my first year as an associate at the firm. I couldn't think of a better way to end my law school career than with the news that I'd be able to do 100% pro bono work for a year – including spending half my time with New Perimeter, DLA's global pro bono initiative.

In college, my interest in social justice drove me to learn what “public interest lawyering” looked like, through internships at the Legal Aid Society, the Brennan Center for Justice, and Children's Rights. I also learned about issues in developing countries through community service trips to

India and the Dominican Republic, as well as my coursework on economics and human rights. In law school, I continued to pursue my interests in social justice and economic development by interning at the Center for Reproductive Rights and serving as a student advocate in clinics on negotiation, mediation and community economic development. When it was time for me to choose a law firm, DLA Piper's commitment to domestic and international pro bono made my decision practically a no-brainer!

One of my goals as a Krantz Fellow was to help develop the firm's transactional pro bono practice. To that end, I represented a number of small businesses, including a workers' cooperative, and nonprofits on general corporate governance and startup issues. I taught several workshops to aspiring business owners in Queens on entity selection and formation. I helped start a new in-house clinic at our New York office where we provide basic legal information to low-income entrepreneurs. The Krantz Fellowship also afforded me the opportunity to learn about issues such as access to justice, impact investing and social enterprise, and representing nonprofit organizations, by attending lectures, panel discussions, and conferences on these topics in New York, Austin, and San Francisco. My domestic pro bono work also enabled me to hone other legal skills, by representing a client in a forced marriage to obtain a divorce and representing a Syrian refugee and his family in appealing his denial to be resettled in the U.S. In my work with New Perimeter, I pursued projects in all three areas of New Perimeter's mission – access to justice, social and economic development, and sound legal institutions. I researched lessons learned in transitional justice systems, pro bono practices in a number of foreign countries, and recommendations for improving evidentiary codes in special courts. I supported New Perimeter's project with Bridges Across Borders Southeast Asia Community Legal Education Initiative, specifically to help develop Myanmar's community and clinical legal education. I accompanied Lisa Dewey to Mexico City where we taught two classes to law students on pro bono culture, in partnership with Mexico Appleseed. I also helped to develop and work on a project with International Bridges to Justice, to support public defenders in Rwanda. And even after the completion of my fellowship, I continue to work on projects related to implementing and updating the Model Legal Framework, a framework of best practices for laws on the regulation of consumer financial protection, which New Perimeter developed in 2015 with Accion and the Smart Campaign.

I am so grateful to have worked with my pro bono clients and project partners during my fellowship year. But I think I may have gotten even more out of it than my clients have. As a Krantz Fellow, I often found myself outside of my comfort zone – whether it was introducing myself to strangers at pro bono events or speaking in front of full classrooms and workshops. I also often took lead drafting responsibility on several projects that I had previously been totally uninformed on – only to then find myself having written a complete draft. These opportunities have made me a better lawyer – even if they were scary at the time – and have given me incredible confidence, which I know I will take with me as I transition to my new group at DLA Piper.

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## About New Perimeter

New Perimeter is a nonprofit organization established by global law firm DLA Piper to provide pro bono legal assistance primarily in the developing and post-conflict world. Founded in 2005 as a result of our firm's commitment to support legal advancement worldwide, New Perimeter draws on the skills and talents of more than 4,000 DLA Piper lawyers globally. To maximize our impact, we send teams of lawyers into the field to work alongside our partners and clients whenever possible. We focus our work on legal education, women and children's rights, access to justice and law reform, environmental protection, economic development and food security.

To learn more about New Perimeter visit [www.newperimeter.com](http://www.newperimeter.com) or contact:

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