



SJCL Graduates 51st Class

The Class of 2024 was cheered by a crowd of over 1,000 family members and friends as the graduates basked in the spotlight at the Saroyan Theatre in June.

BY **LOGAN TENNERELLI**, DEAN OF STUDENTS

SJCL's 51st commencement included the heartwarming moments of triumph, inspiration, and gratitude we've come to cherish throughout the law school's history.

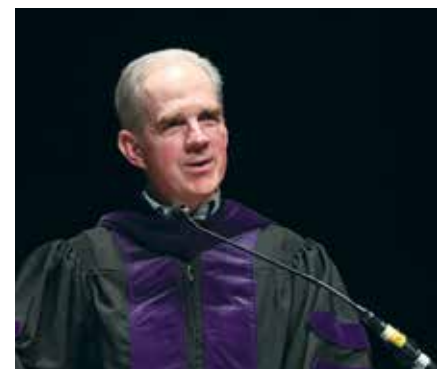
Highlights included Dean Atkinson reading the graduates' biographies in five languages: English, Spanish, Hmong, Punjabi, and Swahili! Many graduates also showed pride in their cultures, identities, and membership in student organizations by donning personalized stoles. One graduate, Jose Ireta, displayed the flag of Mexico as his bio concluded with, "Viva la Mexico!" Members from the SJCL Alumni Association welcomed the graduates to their fold with a gift for each. Dean

Tennerelli hooded the graduates, with the exception of Michael Prentice, who was hooded by his father David, a founding partner of Prentice Long, PC.

The graduating class selected a longtime faculty member, the Honorable Jonathan B. Conklin, to deliver the keynote speech. He received what he called "the best Father's Day gift" – a surprise introduction by his son Jason, who is a prosecutor at the Fresno County District Attorney's Office. Judge Conklin gave the graduates advice from his nearly 20 years on the bench: show up early because on-time is late, play nice, avoid ad hominem attacks, and uphold the integrity of the profession.



Valedictorian **Ann-Marie Padilla**



Commencement Speaker
Honorable Jonathan B. Conklin

Awareness First, Then Advocacy

BY DIANE SKOUTI BAIZA, ALUMNI LIAISON

Trainer, entrepreneur, and activist Jess Fitzpatrick labels himself a Queer Trans Man. This means he was born female, but has transitioned to become a male, and is queer. His partner, (and spouse) Crow Fitzpatrick, a male who identifies as they/them, was inspired to create a training program to address a general need for clarifying information when both he and Jess were students at Clovis Community College.

In collaboration with Racquel Bussani (Law '18), and Adam Ryan Chang, an immigration attorney in San Francisco for the LGBTQ+ community, Jess and Crow presented an informational training session on LGBTQ+ Awareness and Advocacy for SJCL staff and administration in February. The purpose? To strengthen our campus culture of acceptance and belonging. The goal of the training was to exchange information and educate, which can translate into positive and supportive action.

"We are not here to alter perspectives, we prioritize mutual respect through education," Jess said at the start of the session. For anyone who is over the age of 30, the territory is somewhat new. Terms like nonbinary, cisgender and the like can be confusing to the uninformed. The training began with thorough definitions:

Lesbian – women attracted to women, including trans women

Gay – men attracted to men, including trans men

Bisexual – attracted to both binary genders or more

Transgender – not identifying with the gender they were assigned at birth, changes their gender through social, legal, medical and/or surgical means

Queer – umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender

In the plus (+) category, there is:

Intersex – a person born with a combination of male and female biological traits

Pansexual – sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction toward people of all genders



Jess Fitzpatrick (center) and his spouse **Crow** (L) talk with SJCL staff during Advocacy Training workshop.

Asexual – low or absent interest in sexual attraction

Gender Fluid – non-fixed gender identity that shifts over time

Nonbinary – someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression goes beyond or actively resists the current cultural or social expectations of their gender

Cisgender – a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex

Two Spirit – a modern, pan-Indian umbrella term used by some Indigenous North Americans to describe Native people who fulfill a third-gender ceremonial and social role

In addition to understanding the multitude of identifying terms now in common use, actions that produce allyship are a critical element of support to the LGBTQ+ community. The panel noted that allyship is one of the most effective ways to foster a comprehensive sense of belonging. An ally is someone who is not a member of a marginalized or mistreated group, but who expresses or gives their support for that group whenever necessary. As with the first steps toward insight, education is

essential to the cause of allyship. Armed with the knowledge and truth about the LGBTQ+ community, anyone can then grow their comfort zone by remaining alert to discrimination, harassment, or bullying that may happen in their presence. Active listening and observance, and speaking up to support or protect others sets an example that can become contagious. Maintaining confidentiality and trust, and reporting unacceptable incidents are the hallmarks of an ally, and can have a big impact on the local climate.

Our small campus community has always been at its core, welcoming and supportive. We are committed to ensuring that this culture is present and experienced by all students, faculty, and staff, both on and off campus.

Should you become the victim of any kind of harassment or bullying, or you observe any behavior that is unacceptable, please report it. SJCL has always enjoyed a culture of collaboration and acceptance. It is our aim to perpetuate the highest standards of congeniality and comfort for all who pass through our doors.

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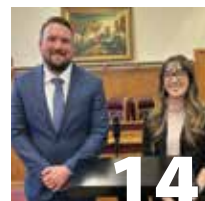
Get Social with SJCL



Inter Alia

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Vision: *To be the premier provider of legal education, scholarship, and service in the San Joaquin Valley.*
Mission: *To educate and develop individuals to become highly skilled attorneys and problem solvers who will benefit their communities through public and private service. In seeking this vision and attaining this mission, SJCL shall embody the values of civility, excellence, integrity, intellectual inquiry, and service.*

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Where are they now?



William McComas (Law '08)



Michael Mahoney (Law '11)



Jennifer Nguyen-Bui (Law '18)

The backstories of graduate students are sometimes distant from, or unrelated to the field of study they ultimately choose, but few are as unrelated as that of SJCL alumna Chineme Anyadiegwu (Law '03). When she applied at SJCL, Chineme had a master's degree in medical microbiology from a university in her home country of Nigeria. Having earned two degrees in microbiology before moving to the United States, Chineme worked as a scientist in various medical labs. She eventually joined Valley Children's Hospital where she worked for 17 years in a clinical lab.

It was her traditional Nigerian father who steered her into a career in medical science, deeming it a respectable and appropriate career for women. Chineme, however, knew she wanted more. Her brother suggested law school, but her father was very much opposed. "The parents rule in Nigeria," she observed wryly. After her father's death, Chineme decided to push her boundaries and finally "actualize herself." Her father's objections ended up becoming the catalyst to attaining her J.D..

When she began law school Chineme was married with two young boys. "My husband was very supportive. I would bring my sons to school and they would wait in the break room until my class was over. They watched me struggle through

law school and the bar exam, and ultimately a change in careers."

On June 1st of this year, one of those sons, Enyinna Anyadiegwu, graduated with SJCL's Class of 2024 with his own J.D. degree! Chineme now practices dependency law representing parents whose children have been removed. The job is heart wrenching and painful, she says, but she loves it. She feels that she is finally serving her true purpose by helping put broken families back together.

A similarly multifaceted overachiever is William McComas (Law '08). "I was in college (undergrad) for all the wrong reasons," William says. As a football player who wasn't sure what he wanted to do, "A progressive counselor helped me to realize my desire to leave a mark and help the community." When he learned of the great need for legal aid and pro bono work, he knew he wanted to practice law.

After attaining his J.D. from SJCL, William went on to earn an MBA from Fresno State. He has served as the Director of the High-Speed Rail Business Support with the Fresno County EDC, and has provided pro bono work in civil matters for CCLS. "Every US citizen has the right to have an attorney representing them," he says, "Which means there must be plenty of pro bono attorneys available." In addition to serving as an associate at Pascuzzi, Pascuzzi & Stoker, William is an owner/partner in a real estate firm, a teacher of business and ag law at Fresno State, and a consultant with the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, among other projects. In 2023 he served as the president of the Fresno County Bar Association, and is a current member of many other professional organizations.

While he admits that the expense that comes with having two daughters (college, weddings, and the like) causes him also to be "in it for the money," William says his initial goal of helping people remains foremost.

The helping theme is also big with alumnus Michael Mahoney (Law '11). As Legal Counsel of Netafirm USA, a multinational company that manufactures irrigation solutions, Michael was heavily involved in a class action suit between



Chineme Anyadiegwu (Law '03), her husband **Bronson**, and her son **Enyinna Anyadiegwu** (Law '24), at his own recent SJCL graduation.

Unity Bar Honors First-Gen Supporter



Francisco “Javier” Rosas (2nd from left) received the Unity Bar Award with SJCL colleagues and students looking on.

BY BETH PITCOCK, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES & COMPLIANCE

Francisco “Javier” Rosas, Director of Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion at San Joaquin College of Law was honored with the Unity Bar Award this spring, for his passion and commitment to supporting unity and diversity in the legal community. The award was presented at the Central California Asian Pacific American Bar Association’s Honorable Mikio Uchiyama Annual Scholarship Banquet in May. Speaking in place of Attorney General Ron Bonta who appeared via video due to a sudden trip to Washington D.C., Associate Justice Shama Ha-

kim Mesiwala noted the grit and tenacity that is required to blaze a path as the first in a family or underrepresented group to achieve a college degree and become a successful professional.

Himself a first generation college graduate, Rosas attended Fresno State to obtain a BA in History and an MA in Higher Education Leadership and Administration after sustaining injuries during military service in Iraq. A Purple Heart recipient, Rosas worked with veterans on the campus of Fresno State before coming to SJCL to continue his support of students seeking higher education and success.

In her speech Justice Mesiwala highlighted other notable firsts, including her own as the product of her father’s immigration from India as he sought freedom and educational opportunities. After attaining her undergrad degree in just three years, Justice Mesiwala enrolled in the UC Davis School of Law at the age of 20. Her long and esteemed career lead to a nomination by Governor Newsom to the California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District, where she was unanimously confirmed.

Merced and the huge shipping company Maersk, for exposure to dangerous chemicals (chromium) in the water. He said there were many people in Merced who were affected and he was able to get a “very good settlement” to help them.

Michael was not always so proactive, however. His entry into the legal profession took a while. “I waited for three months after undergrad to take the LSAT. I didn’t do great on it, but I still wanted to go to law school,” he said. Once enrolled, Michael learned he could no longer “get by” without doing a lot of work as he had during undergrad. “You really do need to learn

the law. It took my first year to figure out how to do the work.” Michael says he has loved his work after learning how to “be a lawyer.” The possibilities (for employment) are endless, he added.

For Jennifer Nguyen-Bui, learning to be a lawyer was easy compared to her need to learn English (it was her second language growing up), and graduate from college as the first in her family to do so. In addition, she had a 3-year-old at home when she began law school, and then had an unexpected pregnancy during. On top of that, both her parents had cancer during that time. “I was always doing the bare

minimum to get by,” she said. She did the reading, typed her notes, recorded lectures, and asked questions. “Law school taught me a lot about how to communicate, how to negotiate,” she added.

Jennifer says the accommodating atmosphere at SJCL helped her make it through. After graduating she was hired as a law clerk at the Visalia DA’s office. Now she handles property code enforcement and works closely with police, the city council, and the public to ensure property is in compliance with the law.



Alumna Tiffany Pack Honored as Pro Bono Attorney of the Year

BY DIANE SKOUTI BAIZA, ALUMNI LIAISON

On her left arm, criminal defense attorney Tiffany Pack (Law '18) has a large tattoo of a jellyfish, an original drawing by her daughter. Her right arm - also fully tattooed (even her elbows are inked) displays colorful and happy images from Disney movies, symbolizing her love of family and adventure. "My job (criminal defense attorney at Fitzgerald Alvarez & Ciummo) is stressful," Tiffany says. Rather than spend a fortune for a therapist, she prefers to talk with her tattoo artist. "He listens to me. It's therapeutic and it makes me feel better."

With her petite stature, whitish-blond hair, and intense but kind blue eyes, Tiffany already stands out in a crowd. Her "skin sleeves" are meant to express her love of Disney and art. "I'm a walking art piece!" Tiffany exclaims. "It (the art) signifies who the person is." And she believes her crimi-

nal defense clients feel more at ease around her because of it. "They think: This b... is bad-ass, because they see me as down to earth, non-judgmental, and unafraid of them with their own, un-Disney like tattoos."

Tiffany carries her suit jacket into court and puts it on before each session. The tattoos attracted some attention during her first few appearances, but no one notices much anymore. "Clients often ask to look at the artwork, and the deputies and I like to compare arms."

A self-described feisty diamond in the rough, Tiffany says she hated school as a kid. Unable to handle any degree of boredom, she wound up in detention, a lot. "I could pick up trash like the best of them!" Rather than an aim to pursue higher education, Tiffany aspired to become an actor and movie star. She appeared in some com-

mercials, but auditions revealed an almost debilitating shyness. Her lack of ability to sing or dance closed the curtain on her dreams of movie stardom.

Having endured an abusive family environment during a 10-year marriage, Tiffany struggled with challenges to find help when filing for divorce. The experience taught her to become self-reliant and determined to support her young children and herself, without help.

As a “Plan B,” Tiffany attained AA and AS degrees in liberal arts and paralegal studies from City College. She became a skilled paralegal. While interning at CCLS, fellow SJCL grad Paul Mullen (Law ’01) suggested she consider law school. An efficient time manager and single mom of two children: her daughter was 12 and her son 10, Tiffany enrolled at SJCL and put her multitasking skills to the test. Beyond the time she committed to her studies, Tiffany prioritized being there for her kids. Her daughter helped by learning to cook, and when in class, Tiffany helped her kids with homework through email and kept tabs on them via cell phone. She never missed any school events and found ways to study her law books while working the snack bar at their various sports competitions. Both in their 20’s now, her daughter is completing her last year for a B.A. in psychology (with plans to go for both a masters and Ph.D), and her son is entering the coast guard but also hopes to work in animation and visual effects. The “go getter” gene is undeniable.

After just six years as an attorney, Tiffany has caught the attention of her colleagues. In May the Fresno County Bar Association chose her as the 2024 Pro Bono Attorney of the Year. In addition to working full-time as an associate at FAC, Tiffany has several gigs on the side. She works with Quall Cardot practicing creditors rights, and Huff Legal in San Francisco doing criminal defense. “I need to keep up with inflation!” she says, but it’s more than that. “I’m not out to change the world,” she says, “I just want to promote justice.”

In addition, Tiffany does special appearances for local and out of town attorneys in criminal, civil and family matters, and a pro bono expungement clinic for CCLS. She works seven days a week, often from home,

so it makes more sense to ask how many hours a week she sleeps, rather than spends working.

“My superpower is time management,” Tiffany says. “I don’t drink, no caffeine, and no drugs.” She has learned that her overcharged mind and anxiety are silenced when she’s active. She says she can’t sit for a movie because she feels she’s wasting time that could be better spent. In her free time Tiffany does community service on behalf of Fresno Unified School District. She mentors high-risk students and stays in contact with them long-term while they work to get their lives together. She sees herself as their “Jiminy Cricket,” a sort of wisecracking conscience. In addition to her selection as Pro Bono Attorney of the Year, she was recently recognized as a “One on One Mentor of the Year” by FUSD.

If that’s not enough to run a person ragged, Tiffany also raises Dalmatians and rescues endangered California Desert Tortoises. She has a few of the hyperactive spotted dogs at home, and there are puppies on the way. Next to a heated doghouse in her backyard is a heated house for 14 tortoises, along with a fenced tortoise run(!) She cares for federally protected, endangered tortoises, some of which grow to 150-200 pounds. The tortoises are barcoded, which makes it legal for her to care for them and Tiffany says they are delightful companions. “They are just like dogs and cats,” she says, “but a little dumber!”

While her star is rising a few hundred miles north of an acting career in Hollywood, Tiffany has set her sights even higher. “I want to be (another) Judge Judy,” she said of the future. “I think we need more



neutral people on the bench,” she adds. She recalled an instance in court where a judge misunderstood her and flipped out, yelling so much she spit. Tiffany says she realized she could do better than that. “I have less than five years to go before I can apply for a judgeship,” she said. For Judge Pro Tem, she may already be eligible “with cause” due to all the time she has put in thus far.

Tiffany says the main secret to her success is honesty. “Everybody wants the truth – I don’t sugar coat anything.” She treats her clients how she would want to be treated, and it appears to be working out quite well.

THE 2024 BARRISTERS' BALL

An enthusiastic crowd of 230 dressed up in their finery to attend the 2024 Barristers' Ball & Scholarship Awards Banquet. Held this year at the new Landmark Square Clovis Senior Activity Center just down the road, the gala hit a high note with the announcement of a record 63 scholarships totaling \$75,572.

Full-Time Faculty of the Year:
Logan Tennerelli & Jeffrey Purvis

Adjunct Faculty of the Year:
Jason Hamm

Students of the Year

4L: Reynaldo Alvarez
Gail Zurek

3L: Jenna Sharma and
Isidro Barragan Sanchez

2L: Lacey Phillips

1L: Jimmy Falaminiano, Jr.
Bradley Rutledge

NALC Student of the Year
Alejandra Tenorio Zurita

BREN Students of the Year
Lisa Talley
Reynaldo Alvarez

ABOTA Scholarship
Kyle Zoldoske

Albert Ramirez Bail Bond Scholarship
Hannah Ravizza

Alumni Association - Mirviss
Geovanna Waters

Alumni Association - Wiseman
Elisa Knott

Alumni Association - Spirit
Ann-Marie Padilla

Andres Diaz Special Ed Scholarship
Reynaldo Alvarez

Artist Tree Scholarship
Vanessa Fayad
Lisa Talley

Baradat & Paboojian
Adam Balakian

Bertha & John Garabedian
Travis Childress
Peter Halajian
Booker Senatore

Cartier First Year Improvement
Peter Halajian

CCBA
Raquel Chavez
Marisol Cruz Rodriguez
Robert Demelo
Nathan Maltes

Darryl Freedman Bar Study Scholarship
Jose Ireta

DTP (most participation)
Isidro Barragan-Sanchez

DTP (most participation)
Rebecca Delgado-Mendez

DTP (first year)
Benjamin Arcure

Elizabeth O'Neill Memorial Scholarship
Madison Erickson

Entrepreneurial Scholarship
Cherry Thomas

Ernest Kinney Trial Lawyer Scholarship
Benjamin Arcure

First Generation Scholarship
Angel Gutierrez-Reyes

Founder's Scholarship
Sumeet Kaur

George J Vasquez Memorial Scholarship
Holly Gallo
Nancy Flores-Castaneda

Ibarra/Casillas LaSUIT Scholarship
Rosa Nava-Garcia
Lacey Phillips
Jenna Sharma

James Pell Memorial Scholarship
Rosa Nava-Garcia

Janice Pearson Scholarship
Joanna Mendoza

Jennifer Oleksa Scholarship
Jacqueline Vazquez

John Loomis Legacy Award
Hannah Ravizza

Kharazi Bar Study Scholarship
Kayla Pace

Kim Mayhew Memorial Scholarship
Rocio Lopez Martinez
Stephanie Adams
Savana Perez
Alejandra Tenorio Zurita

LSCA Community Advancement
Ryan Luna

LSCA Outstanding Member
Rosa Nava-Garcia

LSCA Executive Board Leadership
Joanna Mendoza

LawSUIT Tolerance Scholarship
Audrey Gunlund

Brayden Inchcliff

Legal Edge Consumer Scholarship
Maribel Flores

Peters Foundation Leadership Award
Isidro Barragan-Sanchez
Aaron Draper
Aliana Garcia
Karen Lopez Pena
Milton Ramirez

Mike Rhodes Social Justice Scholarship
Rebeca Delgado-Mendez

Notorious RBG
Blanca Delgado-Mendez

Proctor Scholar of the Year
Robert Demelo

Proper Defense Scholarship
Alice Uribe-Cardona

Public Service Scholarship
Jacqueline Vazquez

Student Bar Association
Deyci Nunez Garcia
Kamaryn Shurtiff
Karen Lopez Pena
Madison Erickson

Soroptimist International
Jatinderdeep Flynn

Trudi Gale Manfredo Scholarship
Blanca Maravilla



Graduation FROM PAGE 1

Valedictorian Ann-Marie Padilla not only graduated with high honors, but also earned the Leon S. Peters Foundation Leadership Award, the Alumni Association Spirit of SJCL Award, and an Individual Merit Award for Oral Argument at the 54th Annual Traynor California Appellate Moot Court Competition. Addressing their fellow graduates, Ann-Marie spoke to that universal moment in a law student's journey when 1Ls ask themselves: Just what have I gotten myself into?!? "It wasn't until my 2L year that I finally began to trust myself," Ann-Marie admitted. Ann-Marie, who has accepted a post-bar clerkship at the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California with the Honorable Erica P. Grosjean, emphasized the importance of using a Juris Doctor degree to create a more just and tolerant society. Concluding, Ann-Marie remarked, "My hope for the future is this: Decades from now, we can come back together, reflect on the journey, and say as I do to everyone now – my friends, just look at exactly what we've gotten ourselves into."





Class of 2024

HIGH HONORS

Ann-Marie Padilla, *Valedictorian*
Lisa Marie Talley

HONORS

Reynaldo Alvarez
Adam Mikeal S. Balakian
Sumeet Kaur
Jacqueline Vazquez

DISTINCTION

Nancy Flores Castaneda
Mason Dupras



Stephanie Louise Adams
Enyinna Bronson Anyadiegwu
Kashvinder Kaur Basra
Raquel Hilda Chavez
Travis Carter Childress
Marisol Cruz Rodriguez
Shaienne Camryn Dominguez
Ryan Patrick Dupras
Madison Claire Erickson
Deanna Elizabeth Fernandez
Jose Guadalupe Ireta Rosas Perez
Zachary Ellis Jones
Elisa Marie Knott
Gabriel Max Lara
Nathan Russell Maltes
Blanca Maravilla
Marcus James Marderosian
James Pilibos Meinert
Darien Leigh Mendonca
Joanna Mendoza
Kayla Ashley Pace
Carlos Alberto Pedroza
Savana Alexandria Perez
Viviana Perez
Michael Galen Prentice
Hannah Lynn Ravizza
Samantha Nicole Schales
Alejandra Tenorio-Zurita
Douglas Stewart Timpson
Alice Saldana Uribe
Kyle Everett Zoldoske
Gail Zurek



Alumni and Law Students Mix it Up

The Alumni/Student mixer held at The Point in late May provided the perfect opportunity to initiate new connections and rekindle old ones. Some 40 attendees nibbled on snacks and sipped refreshing libations courtesy of Hernandez Law.

A group of current students took advantage of the chance to chat with some practicing SJCL grads to gain insights into their success.



Origin Stories of Inspiration

It's common knowledge around here that many of our law students come to SJCL because someone, like a previous graduate who is now a successful attorney, recommended they think about attending law school. In addition to their love and admiration for their alma mater, most graduates recognize that the education and training they attained here was topnotch.

With that in mind, a lot of people have a niece or nephew, administrative assistant, babysitter, next door neighbor, favorite waiter, or child of their own who is interested in becoming a lawyer. Or, maybe they have not yet realized they are a good match for the legal profession.

So many of our alumni are indebted to the wisdom of an earlier graduate who pointed them in the direction of SJCL, we thought we'd share some of their stories.

Vanessa Freitas (Law '21)

Vanessa was working for Michael Dias (Law '93) as a legal secretary and eventually, a paralegal at the Dias Law Firm, Inc. She had just completed the paralegal program when Mr. Dias walked into her office and stated, "I think I made a mistake; you don't belong working as a paralegal. You belong in law school." He suggested she sign up for the next available LSAT exam. He knew she always wanted to be a lawyer. "He was there to encourage me and give me the motivation to finally accomplish my dream", says Vanessa. "He has been a constant support and motivation for me throughout my journey." Vanessa has worked at the Dias Law Firm for more than 15 years.

Samantha Williamson (Law '21)

Samantha says that she and Shanna Hesketh (Law '17) competed on the same mock trial team in college. "The moment I met her, she became an inspiration," Samantha says. After hours of talking, hanging out, and her many pep talks, Shanna became someone Samantha looked up to immensely. "She told me she believed in me, and that I had what it took to be an attorney. With her confidence I applied to law school and graduated," Samantha says. "During my time at SJCL I had even more of her amazing pep talks, unfettered sup-

port, and (the example she set) as someone to look up to." Samantha says Shanna is the reason she kept at it and achieved such a huge accomplishment.

Raquel Busani (Law '18)

Raquel says Thornton Davidson (Law '93) has been like a life coach to her in matters both SJCL and otherwise. "He encouraged me to purchase my first home at the age of 26, and he made sure I looked into what SJCL had to offer before deciding to apply to other schools," says Raquel. She says these are just a few of the reasons she is grateful for his guidance, mentorship, and friendship throughout the years.

David Austin (Law '15)

David took a summer course in Business Law at Clovis Community College in June of 2009, which he enjoyed a great deal. Professor Janet Fiorentino (Law '97) would allow a few points of extra credit if students volunteered to brief a case in front of the class, which David says he liked doing. "One day she asked if I had ever considered law school, and not long after I was attending an information night at SJCL. I had an encouraging conversation with Dean Pearson and the rest is history, as

they say!" David says he enjoyed Professor Fiorentino's teaching and personal interest, which he says illustrates the force for good that a professor can have on their students. "Thank you Janet and SJCL!"

Honorable Georgia York (Law '78)

As a student majoring in Criminology at Fresno State, Georgia took two law classes from local attorney William Perez. "He had positive things to say in my blue books about my writing skills and mentioned law school. I was a working-class kid that knew no lawyers or judges and had never considered the possibility of law as a career," Georgia said. Bob told her about SJCL. After taking the leap and enrolling, Georgia secured a part time position with Parichan Renberg and Crossman. Two alumni from SJCL were associates there; Ima Jean Harvey (Law '75 – Deceased) and Robert Williams (Law '75). "I had the good fortune to work with them both," Georgia says she recalls asking Robert what a motion was. "He was a great mentor, as was Ima Jean. I owe them both a big debt of gratitude for their guidance," she added. Georgia went on to become an Administrative Law Judge for the California Unemployment Appeals Board.

City of Fresno Women's Commission Scholarship

Congratulations to **Deyci Nunez Garcia** (2L) for being awarded the City of Fresno Women's Commission Scholarship in June. On top of being a law student, Deyci is a single mom to three boys, a dental hygienist, and as of a few weeks ago, President of SJCL's Law Students for Community Advancement.

Deyci was honored with other recipients at a ceremonial presentation at a recent Fresno City Council meeting.

We are proud of you, Deyci!



Moot Court Finalists Challenged by Judges



Connor Goodnight (2L) faces the judges in the final round of moot court.



Moot Court Appellate winner **Connor Goodnight** (2L) and Appellee winner **Rosa Nava Garcia** (2L)

Appellate Attorney Winners

Rosa Nava Garcia (2L)
Connor Goodnight (2L)

Semi-Finalists

Enyinna Anyadiegwu (4L)
Kayleigh Benson (2L)
Manpreet Singh (2L)
Yanavey McCloskey (2L)
Natalie Salgado (3L)
Maria Vidal (3L)



(L-R) Enyinna Anyadiegwu, Connor Goodnight, US Magistrate Judge Stanley Boone, Superior Court Judge Jon Conklin, Rosa Nava Garcia, and Kayleigh Benson.

Of the 32 would-be attorneys who started last spring's Moot Court competition, only eight remained by the end of round one. All but four were eliminated in round two, which concluded with the winning finalists: appellate attorney Connor Goodnight and appellee attorney Rosa Nava Garcia, both 2Ls.

During opening statements of the final round, the judges pounced like stalking panthers: "Are you maintaining that so and so and such and such....? Are you sure about that?" Regardless of the accuracy of the attorney's assertions, they were analyzed, doubted, and riddled with questions designed to throw them off their game and flatten their confidence.

"It was challenging but I relied heavily on my preparation and remained confident in my knowledge of the case," said Rosa Nava Garcia. "Rather than becoming defensive or flustered, I acknowledged the intensity of the questions and maintained

a respectful demeanor while defending my position." Garcia hopes to someday practice immigration and criminal law.

As a debrief after the brain tussle, United States Magistrate Judge Stanley Boone and Superior Court Judge Jon Conklin acknowledged they had been harsh. "Do you feel like you were beat up? We hope so!" chuckled Judge Boone. But the students had remained unflappable. Mr. Goodnight, they said, stood strong on his argument while remaining respectful and calm, never wavering, as did Ms. Nava Garcia.

The two other finalists, Enyinna Anyadiegwu (4L) and Kayleigh Benson (2L) also drew praise from the judges. "You all know the law very well, we clearly asked you difficult questions," Judge Conklin noted. "I would encourage each of you to consider appellate law, you all have the ability to succeed in appellate court."

Noting that both he and Judge Boone had served as federal prosecutors during

their careers, Judge Conklin applauded the students for their steadfast resolve to answer their questions. "Always answer the judges' questions first, and then explain your answer. Never ignore a question from a judge," he said.

When the last student's eight minutes were up, the judges retired to chambers to choose the winner. They emerged not as stern-faced, razor-edged law lords, but as experienced and kindly mentors who would now compliment and encourage the ringed law students.

"I encourage you to watch trials at the 5th District Court of Appeal," advised Judge Boone. "It will make you a better trial attorney, and you will find that they are even ruder than we were!"

Moot Court professors Justin Gilio and Peggy Sasso were also complementary of this year's class. "They grew a lot in both writing and oral advocacy," said Professor Sasso. "I think it helped that they each had to argue both sides during their preparation," added Professor Gilio.

Newest Attorneys Join the Bar

Ten of the 13 SJCL grads who passed the February 2024 Bar Exam were sworn to the Bar by fellow graduate Honorable Pahoua Lor (Law '08) and feted with a champagne reception. With the nationwide decline of law school graduates, new attorneys are being snapped up by law offices to fill long-vacant positions.

Congratulations!

Cindy Arredondo
Harmandeep Kaur Aujla
Sandra Borunda
Chelsea Chavez
Vanessa Dominici Martens
Erika Esqueda
Gabrielle Grieser
Bradley Kalebjian
Diana Malcolm
Leslie Miller
Christina Rodriguez
Ashveen Takhar
Samantha Williamson



Honorable **Pahoua Lor** (Law '08) officiated over the swear-in ceremony



SJCL's latest bar passers were sworn in by fellow SJCL graduate, Honorable **Pahoua Lor** (Law '08).



Not Your Parent's Field Trip

Unlike the breezy school field trips of bygone eras, these students came to get a jump on blazing their career pathways in law.

BY **DIANE SKOUTI BAIZA**, ALUMNI LIAISON

SJCL received a visit from the Law and Justice Academy from Visalia's Redwood High School in mid-April. Around a dozen students toured the campus, heard a panel Q & A with current law students, and joined two SJCL alumni - NALC Director Linda Barreto and NALC Staff Attorney Jessica Jaramillo Perez - for some direct insight about the profession. Though still mere high schoolers, these students mean business.

As part of the Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways program, Redwood High School offers its students the opportunity to join career-based Academies where they gain targeted training and real-world experience. Agriculture, the Arts and Entertainment, and Engineering and Architecture are just a few of the many options students can choose.

The Academy of Law and Justice gives students early exposure to the study and practice of law with an intense curriculum that they complete concurrently with required general education courses. The study of "origins, purpose, use of law, and of significant historical cases, can help students develop into well-rounded and community conscious citizens" before they even finish high school.

It is hoped that the transition to college and ultimately law school can be greatly enhanced by studying the foundations of law and criminal justice, constitutional law, and advanced civil law early on. The CTE pathways give students the benefit of a confident edge by the time they are ready for college.

Many of the students in the Law and Justice Academy even serve internships in places like the District Attorney and Public Defender's office.

Academy students were very complimentary about their visit:



SJCL Panel for the Academy (L-R): **Gabriel Sanchez** (4L), **Joanna Mendoza** (Law '24), and **Jacqueline Amador** (4L)



Students from the Redwood High School Law and Justice Academy had the opportunity to speak with current law students.

"It was very informative and interesting. I liked how we heard from law students and how they manage."

"I loved the attorneys, and the students were super helpful by explaining what to expect if we decide to go to law school."

"I learned a lot about time management."

"Our visit was very organized and comfortable. I felt welcomed to be there."

"The student panel (gave us time to ask questions) and they seemed eager to speak with us."

"I loved the experience."

"I liked how open they were in explaining their experiences and how they handled their difficult years (in law school)."



Freedom of Expression vs. Freedom from Fear

While First Amendment principles provide the fundamental right of freedom of expression, the legal implications of recent student activism and the resulting chaos on college campuses are, to say the least, complex.

The degree of passion regarding the Israeli – Palestinian conflict has revived a historical conundrum that pits the rights of students to express themselves, against the duty of educational institutions to maintain an environment of peace amid respectful discourse and conduct.

Since the years of dissent over the Civil Rights movement and Viet Nam, college campuses have been ground zero for the expression of emotionally charged viewpoints. As the flag bearers for new generations of leaders and politicians, college students are ripe with the desire to raise awareness, express solidarity, or advocate for changes in policy, often aimed at their own universities.

But how to weigh the rights of freedom of speech against protest that may be seen

as threatening or prejudicial? Especially when the issues have long roots throughout history and are highly subjective. It is a balancing act between constitutional rights and the need for universities to ensure the safety and well-being of all campus constituents. As with any laws based on common sense, the right to free speech and protest are not absolute. They are subject to “reasonable” time, place, and manner restrictions.

Is it reasonable to apply the legal aspect of distinction? Distinction between protected speech and conduct while expressing protected speech - that fits into the categories of harassment or intimidation. Under their legal obligation to investigate and act on such incidents, universities must ultimately provide a safe and inclusive environment for all. If misconduct is present, there must be discipline.

It is, after all, the job of our universities to foster open dialogue and mutual respect amid deeply divisive issues. Such circum-

stances should exemplify how to engage in peaceful, yet effective dialogue.

Adding another layer of complexity to the situation is pressure from external elements like special interest groups or government entities, to act against certain forms of protest or expression. Recent legislation that targets boycotts of Israel or Israeli settlements has been enacted by several states, which raises questions about the ability of universities to regulate their activities related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

If we are to safeguard the role of educational institutions as the unprejudiced venues of discourse they are intended to be, we must ensure the co-existence of First Amendment principles, anti-discrimination laws, and institutional policies governing free expression and conduct.

The state of turmoil in the world today is a colossal learning/teaching moment. How we respond will determine the future of our ability to practice peaceful conflict resolution and apply justice at every level.

James Weakley Recognized for Lifetime Achievement



PHOTO: HOWARD WATKINS

James Weakley (Law '78) receives the Fresno County Bar Association's Annual Bernie Witkin Lifetime Achievement Award from **David Gonzalez**.

SJCL congratulates alumnus James D. Weakley (Law '78) for receiving the Bernard E. Witkin Lifetime Achievement Award. The award, presented at the FCBA's Annual Witkin Luncheon in June, is given to "a member of the legal profession in recognition of his/her contribution to the advancement of jurisprudence through community service, scholarship, bar activities, and the like."

Having attained his Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science in 1975, Mr. Weakley graduated from SJCL just three years later and began his 46-year (and counting) practice. He was a founding partner at Weakley & Arendt, with a focus on defending public entities and their employees. His clients over the years have included elected and other public figures, including judges, district attorneys, sheriffs, chiefs of police, and heads of public agency departments. He has served as an arbitrator, mediator and judge pro tem for the Fresno County Superior Court. Mr. Weakley has a number of bar admissions and belongs to various professional organizations. He is also praised for being an exceptional mentor. We are proud to count Mr. James Weakley among our distinguished alumni.

**and the
survey
says...**

Thank You Alumni!

We had a record number of responses to the 2024 Alumni Survey. With one hundred more respondents than last year, some 316 graduates took the time to complete the rather lengthy survey, and were entered into three drawings for gift cards for their trouble. We are delighted at the response and determined to use the data to make suggested improvements wherever possible.

Of those who completed the survey, Erica Camarena (\$50 Gift Card), Nidavone Niravanh (\$30 Gift Card), and Susan Anderson (\$20 Gift Card) were the names drawn for thank you gift cards!



Be Kind to Lawyers Day!

Did you know that April 9th, 2024, was International "Be Kind to Lawyers Day"? International Be Kind to Lawyers Day is celebrated on the second Tuesday in April, with an aim to dispel the negative associations often ascribed to lawyers.

As one of the oldest professions in human history, lawyers are much maligned with the perception that they are a necessary evil. It's easy to forget how much work goes into mastering the law so that attorneys can assist just about all of us at one time or another.

So CHEERS to all of our alumni who are diligently serving those in need of expert legal advice, Happy Belated Be Kind to Lawyers Day! All attorney jokes aside, you are much appreciated!

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