



2014 TRI-CITIES YOUTH & JUSTICE FORUM:

“The Youth and Law forum is one of the most incredible experiences for kids in Eastern Washington. When I was a kid, I didn't know what it took to be an attorney. My friends may have known, but I did not. This program gives every youth in Washington a chance to learn and explore a career in law and justice.” Second year UW law student, Michael Huggins

UW law students joined the Washington State Minority & Justice Commission at the 2014 Youth & Justice Forum hosted in Tri-Cities, WA. Over 200 high school and middle school students met with legal professionals, judges, supreme court justices, attorneys, and law students to learn about careers in law enforcement and criminal & civil law practice while participating in lively discussions about legal issues impacting youth. Omar Contreras, first year UW law student, stated, “I found that the middle and high school students that attended the Youth Law Forum were very energetic and excited to meet individuals within the legal field. These students were also incredibly prepared for the multi-faceted discussions that came up during the course of the day. As someone who was raised in a low to moderate income area, I can attest to how impactful programs like the Youth Law Forum can be to young people who are trying to learn about career opportunities beyond their immediate community.”

UW CPLD Assistant Director Lisa Castilleja noted that it is not just an incredible opportunity for the students; every year the legal professionals involved express how inspired they feel after participating in the program and how much they have learned from these incredible young people. The law students had a similar experience. Binh Von, first year UW law student, described her experience, “I'm very grateful for the privilege to meet professionals from different areas of social justice and to work with students brimming with curiosity about the law and our legal system. Talking to the different professionals, from police officers to judges, was both informative and humbling. My experience at the forum gave me new perspectives and allowed me to get a taste of what happens outside the classroom. Seeing Eastern Washington is another splendor in itself since it was my first time going east of the mountains!”

The ability to have such a diverse group of UW law students participate in the program helped inspire the rural high school and middle school students. Their diverse perspectives and experience helped shape the discussion during the breakout sessions and inspired the young participants to consider pursuing a career in the law. First year UW law student Michelle Rusk participated in these discussions: “I was surprised by how eager many of the students were to dig into the legal scenarios we went over. Right away students wanted to read and apply different statutes to the fact patterns, and I couldn't have

been more impressed.” It was such a great opportunity for the law students to pay it forward. Law school is a rigorous educational program so taking time out of their schedules to participate in the Youth & Justice Forum was a challenge for the students however they all felt it was an important thing to do. “The Youth & Law forum provided us with the opportunity to relate to students who *want* to pursue higher education but find college and law school out of reach. We were not only able to tell them that they could do it, but show them that they could - because we were living examples of it.” Cecilia Jeong, second year UW law student.

It was this commitment to make a difference that inspired many of the volunteers to participate in the program. The number of legal professionals who came together for the Youth & Justice Forum demonstrated the importance of reaching out to the youth of our communities to inspire them to pursue a higher education. "It was an extremely inspiring event in which you could interact with people who have had success in the legal field and those who have yet to enter it. You can see how one generation can inspire the next." James Wang, first year UW law student.



“I had a wonderful time at the Youth & Justice Forum! It was great seeing so many high school and middle school students interested in law school and careers in the criminal justice field. I enjoyed representing UW Law at the Forum and seeing the community come together to put on this very educational and motivational event for Eastern Washington youth.” Sara Alavi, second year UW Law Student.

Top row left to right: Cody Mullikin, James Wang, Binh Von, Cecilia Jeong, Michelle Rusk, Michael Huggins
Front row (seated): Omar Contreras, Sara Alavi