

GWNY ADDS FALL SEMESTER, DOUBLING IN SIZE



A BIGGER BITE OF THE BIG APPLE

BY MARY A. DEMPSEY

EACH SPRING SINCE 2017, A GROUP OF SECOND AND third-year GW Law students interested in business and finance law have packed their professional clothes and headed to New York City. They leave D.C. for GW Law in New York, or GWNY (pronounced “Gwinny”), an intense semester-long program taught in the offices of top law firms working in mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcy law, business litigation, and other business and finance law practices.

This fall, GWNY added an additional semester to the program so as many as 40 students annually—more than double the participants of past years—can take part in the experiential learning. Each class in the program is taught by a GW Law full-time or adjunct faculty member. GW Law is the only non-New York law school with a program of this kind.

“It’s an innovative and immersive program. Students gain so much when they learn from someone who is practicing law for a living,” said Jeffrey Kohn, JD ’84, a partner at O’Melveny & Myers for nearly four decades. Kohn, a GW Law graduate who served as managing partner of O’Melveny’s New York office, is a leading practitioner in labor and employment law. After teaching as an adjunct in the GWNY program for six years, he joined GW Law in March as a professor of practice in business and finance law. He now becomes the school’s anchor faculty member in New York where he teaches business lawyering in GWNY.

“This semester, our GWNY students will take legal drafting with a senior lawyer at UBS, banking law with a senior banking lawyer at Sullivan & Cromwell, and securities law with a partner at Mayer Brown,” Kohn said. “Ike Sorkin, a partner at Mintz & Gold, will teach white collar law topics.”



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GWNY students take most of their classes in the mornings and evenings. During the day, they are busy with required field placements at organizations offering business-focused externships, including the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA), SIFMA, Lawyers Alliance, and the New York State Commercial Courts. Throughout the program, working lawyers mentor GWNY students, take part in panel discussions, and connect with students at networking events and workshops. The program has been pivotal in helping GWNY graduates land jobs at prestigious New York firms, including Baker Botts; Clifford Chance; Davis Polk; Hogan Lovells; Kirkland & Ellis; Morgan Lewis; Mound Cotton; Orrick; and Ropes & Gray.

Omid Rahnama, JD '18, was one of the first students in GWNY. He already had the pieces in place for a litigation career at a Southern California boutique firm that represented celebrities. When he saw a note announcing the launch of GWNY, he applied out of curiosity "and to get a little taste of New York."

IT CHANGED HIS LIFE.

"After GWNY, I realized I wanted to do corporate restructuring work," he explained. "New York is the center of the corporate restructuring world, but I'm not from New York and I had no contacts in the industry. Through GWNY, I could speak with my mentors, my professors, and associates at firms I met through networking events. They talked about what it meant to be a corporate lawyer. You learn from the war stories they tell you about cases they worked on."

GWNY led Rahnama to an internship with the Securities and Exchange Commission and a clerkship at the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in the District of Delaware. Rahnama, now an associate with Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, said GWNY's hands-on experience helped him stand out when looking for a job in New York.

The addition of a second GWNY semester each year is designed to deepen GW Law's penetration in the New York market and elevate its students' competitiveness in business and finance law.

GW Law Professor Jeffrey Manns, GWNY's faculty director, said the program's intentionally small size is a key to its success.

"GW Law is a big school. Each class of JD students is over 500 students," Manns said. "One of the objectives of GWNY is to give students an intimate environment in which to learn about practicing business law in New York. It is a wonderful capstone experience that helps students integrate what they learned in D.C. with experiential learning and simultaneously build a network to launch their careers."

Rahnama said small classes also made the students more accountable.

"If you're in a class with 100 people, you might come to class without doing the reading, thinking the chances are you won't be called upon," he said. "But in a small classroom, there's a high chance of engagement with the professor at every single session. You go to the class dressed professionally and you have greater engagement with the course material."

Kohn said the program's growth has been propelled by the engagement of alumni, particularly the seven cohorts of GWNY graduates. "We engage alumni as mentors or advisors, have them participate as guest speakers. Right now, for example, I'm organizing a panel of in-house counsels [with alumni]," he said.

Alumni have spoken with GWNY students about networking, professionalism, and what it is like to be a junior associate at a corporate law firm. They have joined panel discussions on a range of corporate law issues. Lawyers not affiliated with GW also take part in GWNY events.

GWNY alumna Kelly Donahue, JD '18, works on mergers and acquisitions as an associate at O'Melveny & Myers. She makes herself available to GWNY students for informal coffee chats. She also signed up as a mentor this semester.

Like Rahnama, Donahue had a career plan in place—a job with a boutique law firm focused on art and museums—before she enrolled in GWNY. Prior to law school, she had worked in a range of positions, including with museum organizations in the European Union. Her GWNY field assignment was with Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts in New York.

"I credit GWNY with my switch from litigation to corporate law. It was my favorite semester at GW Law and it opened my eyes to a whole new world," she said. "The second I got exposure to corporate transactions, I thought, 'I need to do this.'"

For one of her GWNY classes, Donahue had to mark up agreements as an assignment. She said the practical experience helped shape her career. "I'm an M&A attorney now—I love my job—and I mark up purchase agreements all the time," she explained.

GWNY students forge strong bonds with one another during the program—and sometimes after. Rahnama, Donahue, and another member of their GWNY 2017 class continue to meet a few times a year for brunch. Students in subsequent GWNY years hold annual reunions or cocktail parties to stay in touch with one another.

Manns said GWNY gives GW Law students the best of both worlds.

"GW offers students exposure to the world of business regulation in Washington, D.C. GWNY builds on that experience by giving students a chance to get hands-on exposure to the epicenter of the business and finance law world in New York," Manns explained.

Donahue strongly recommends GWNY for any student with "an inkling of interest in corporate law."

"Even if you do the GWNY program and think litigation is still a better place for you, you'll understand the importance of business law as a litigator. And understanding what a corporate attorney does will inform your practice later on," she said. "You will become a better litigator."



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