

No Borders

UBC LAW STUDENTS

# on the Search

## for Career Opportunities Abroad

By Joe Wiebe

Daniel Loutfi ('09) says he caught the “international bug” as a child when he lived in Ethiopia for three years while his parents were working there. Soon after completing his undergraduate degree, he took some time off to travel. “Then it hit me: I had been reading stuff like *The Economist* since I was 14 for fun. Wait a second—this is not normal. I should find someone who can pay me to do this.”

Having lived in France and Beirut for different stints, and being fluent in French and English with some knowledge of Arabic, Loutfi decided to pursue a career in the Foreign Service. He applied to UBC Law where he took every International Law course he could and also worked as a research assistant with Professor Benjamin Perrin, who specializes in International Criminal Law.

Unlike many of his fellow students, who began applying for summer positions in their second year and identifying firms where they hoped to article, Loutfi had to wait until much closer to graduation before he could begin the next step in his career quest.

“I had to deal with a lot of uncertainty for a long time,” he admits. “There was a year and a half or two years where I wasn’t applying to law firms and I was pretty nervous about what would happen if nothing came through.”



Daniel Loutfi with UBC Law Professor Liz Edinger at graduation (J.D. '10)

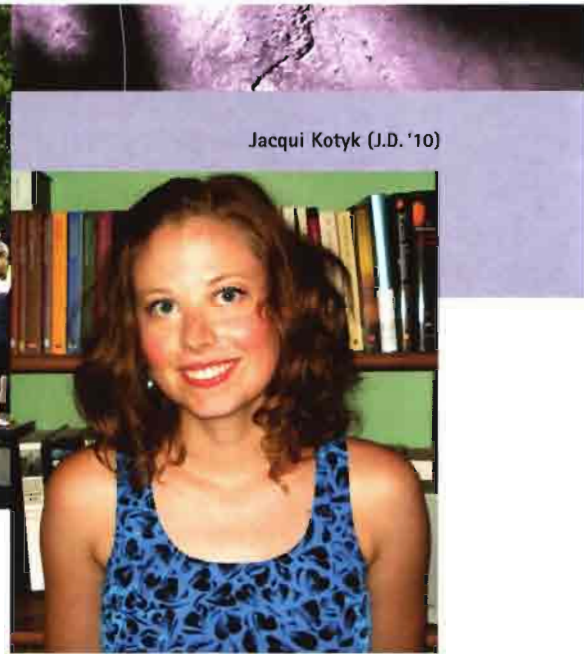
All of Loutfi's hard work and determination eventually paid off when he was hired by the Department of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa this past spring.

UBC Law Career Services Public Interest Coordinator Tracy Wachmann (LL.B. '94) admits that going the international route, especially in public interest work, puts more of the onus on individual students to find their own path.

With a background in public interest law, she is familiar with some of the challenges that face students interested in pursuing a career in this field. Wachmann recommends two routes for those interested in international public interest law: international internships and graduate studies.

To help students find opportunities, Wachmann provides one-on-one counselling to explore career building strategies, identify internship opportunities, review application materials and discuss geographic areas of interest and practice settings. Wachmann is currently developing a *Public Interest Legal Careers Guide* with information on careers with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, intergovernmental and international quasi-governmental organizations, international internships and fellowships.

She also organizes seminars on practicing public interest law and information sessions on international internships, which include panels with students like Jacqui Kotyk (J.D. '10) who have recently completed internships.



Jacqui Kotyk (J.D. '10)

In the summer of 2009, Kotyk volunteered at Chintan, an advocacy organization for waste pickers in New Delhi, India. With no state-run recycling service, they provide a valuable service, and she says, "one of the most efficient recycling services in the world."

Her involvement was on a public advocacy campaign related to climate change, "working to raise the profile of waste pickers around greenhouse gas mitigation, and bring that to the community in India as well as to the international community just in time for the Copenhagen Conference."

The internship was invaluable. "Number one, I basically had an advocacy role in a public international law setting in terms of advocating change in the next treaty or protocol that's supposed to come out of the climate change convention."

She also believes it was important for her to know what it is like to live in a developing country. "If I do go into public international law, not understanding what's happening to people in their day-to-day lives would be problematic."

International practice can also involve working for law firms in some of the world's major centres. Pamela Cyr, Director of Career Services at UBC Law, has observed a number of J.D. and graduate students interested in pursuing employment opportunities in places such as New York, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and Australia.

UBC Law Career Services Team: (left to right) Jennifer Lau (Associate Director, Career Services), Pamela Cyr, and Tracy Wachmann.



For those looking south of the border, opportunities in New York and Massachusetts offer the easiest transition, as Canadian law school grads can write the bar exam and become licensed to practice law without any additional requirements. California is also an option, but Canadian graduates must satisfy that state's requirements in addition to passing the bar.

In 2009 UBC Law launched a joint legal education program with the University of Hawai'i which will help open more doors for UBC students who want to practice in the US. Students who complete the program will receive degrees from UBC and the University of Hawai'i. The University of Hawai'i is accredited by the American Bar Association, which allows law students to seek admission to practice in any state.

For students looking further afield, "graduates of Canadian law schools are attractive to British firms because of the common law degree, the relatively high level of education and training (in the UK, a law degree is a first degree, not a second one as it is in North America), and the fact that many Canadian lawyers often speak at least one other language," says Cyr.

"Hong Kong is also an option for Canadian lawyers, especially those who are fluent in Mandarin or Cantonese. UBC Law has a joint legal education program with the University of Hong Kong which assists UBC students meeting the qualification requirements for practice."

Cyr continues, "International firms usually help with the visa application process for those interested in working for them, and Hong

Kong Immigration tends to look favourably on Commonwealth passports."

The UBC Law Career Services Office (CSO) offers students support and resources to assist in their search for employment—close to home or far afield. Panel presentations such as "Careers in International Arbitration," "Practicing Law in New York" and "Practicing Law in London, England" have all been well attended by students who, like Loutfi, have caught the "international bug" and are looking for opportunities abroad.

The CSO also prints an annual *Careers Guide* and *Graduate Law Careers Guide* with bar requirements and other information on becoming licensed to practice law in other jurisdictions.

"The UBC law degree is prestigious and highly regarded in many parts of the world," explains Cyr. "The opportunities for our graduates are wide-ranging, whether they want to work locally, internationally, in public interest or with a large firm."

While there may be many different routes to establishing careers in international law, the common thread seems to be students with determination and ingenuity. ●

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