

# CHICAGO LAW

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## Law School Women Earn Spots in Selective Leadership Program

By Jerry DeJaager

Four graduates of the Law School are among the 37 members of the 2017 class of the highly selective Leadership Greater Chicago Fellows Program. The 10-month program is widely regarded as the premier program engaging rising-star men and women with the civic issues shaping Chicago's present and future.

The four Law School graduates are Katie Hill, '07; Karen Schweickart, '03; Kristen Seeger, '02; and Asha Spencer, '10. They were recommended and strongly supported by two previous LGC fellows, Michele Ilene Ruiz, '94, and Alison Siegler, a clinical professor of law at the Law School. Now in its 34th year, the fellows program has convened more than a thousand racially and ethnically diverse participants from the private, nonprofit, and public sectors. Acceptance into the program is based on demonstrated leadership abilities and civic engagement, along with what the program describes as "the passion and drive needed to tackle major issues facing the Greater Chicago region."

For a full day each month, LGC fellows learn from expert presenters about a crucial issue, such as education, healthcare, or crime.

"The learning is incredible," Spencer said. "I grew up in Chicago and went to public schools here, and I follow local news quite closely, yet I have learned a vast amount at each session."

Added Hill: "One of the most valuable parts of my Law School experience was the rigorous training in how to consider a broad range of perspectives and use them to tackle complex and thorny legal questions. I'm continuing to build on that and put those skills to use through my LGC experience, tackling some of the biggest challenges facing the region."

Beyond the presenters' content, the LGC fellows learn from each other as they work together to identify possible solutions for civic problems. "LGC is remarkably skillful at fostering open, constructive discussions among people with very different backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences," Seeger said. "It's quite valuable to hear such a wide range of perspectives on these important issues."

Schweickart cited another important broadening aspect of LGC participation: "Once you go to work at a particular place in a particular sector and you become really engaged with that work, your circle of acquaintances can narrow pretty substantially. LGC shows you many other points of view, ones that you might be missing. It takes you out of your comfort zone in very constructive ways."

### SCALING UP

In addition to preparing for and participating in the daylong issue-oriented sessions, LGC fellows also are expected to join in a substantial number of other activities that can include retreats, site visits, discussion groups, additional conversations with leaders and experts, out-of-area travel opportunities, service projects, and cultural and social events.

All of the Law School women in the LGC program have demanding jobs. When Hill began the program, she was a senior policy advisor to Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel; during the program she became director of policy, research and development for the Cook County State's Attorney. Schweickart is deputy general counsel at Citadel LLC; Seeger is a partner at Sidley Austin LLP; and Spencer is a partner at Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott LLP.

They have taken on additional civic responsibilities, too. Spencer is a trustee of Columbia College Chicago, and last year she chaired the Law School's Law Firm Challenge; Seeger serves on the board of a community-based organization, Mujeres Latinas en Acción, and actively supports the work of Spark Ventures, a Chicago-based nonprofit focused on business-driven philanthropy; Hill serves on the Services Committee of Family Focus, and mentors elementary students in the Chicago Public Schools, helping them consider high school choices; and Schweickart is on the board of Urban Initiatives, a nonprofit that empowers Chicago youth to become agents of community change through sports-based programming.

Seeger said that a crucial lesson from the Law School helped her handle the responsibilities associated with participation in the Fellows program: "Like most of my peers, I'm working 60-hour weeks at my 'real job,' and doing other things, too. I knew how much busier it would make my life to do this, but there's something very valuable you learn from being at the Law School—how to scale up when a situation calls for it."

Ruiz, a 2006 LGC fellow who is now a member of LGC's board of directors, remarked that the support she and Professor Siegler provided to the 2017 applicants is an important example of women going beyond mentoring to actively sponsoring opportunities for other women.

"These four women are all completely deserving of their places in this LGC class, and they wouldn't be in it if they weren't," she said. "That Alison and I had Law School



connections to them that led us to recognize their abilities, encourage them to apply, and strongly endorse them probably didn't hurt."

Ruiz—who also sponsored Siegler for the 2013 LGC class after the two had met while on a federal judicial screening committee for Senator Dick Durbin—notes that she would not have attended the Law School at all if the Law Women's Caucus had not contacted her while she was filling out law school applications and urged her to consider UChicago.

"I'm paying it forward for that amazing outreach that has meant so much to my career and my life," Ruiz said. She serves on the advisory board of the Law School's Women's Mentoring Program, is a past member of the Visiting Committee, and co-chaired an annual fund campaign for the Law School. She is a partner at Sidley Austin LLP, which has been a strong supporter of the LGC program since the program's inception.

Siegler observed that the Law School experience of the

current LGC participants would have a salutary effect on the fellows' discussions: "When looking for solutions to big civic issues like education and criminal justice, multiple factors have to be taken into account. A Chicago law student learns to recognize that almost any problem is a systems problem and ought to be approached in that way. Asha, Katie, Kristen, and Karen bring that kind of thinking to everything they do, and the class's deliberations will benefit from it."

#### **NOW AND NEXT**

LGC fellows typically form into a cohesive group that continues getting together regularly, long after the 10-month program has ended. The program also offers many events at which alumni participate. "The Fellows program lasts for a lifetime," Ruiz said. "The relationships only become deeper over time, and the strong and reliable network keeps growing."

Added Schweickart: "I feel honored and very fortunate to have been chosen, and thankful to Michele and Alison for their support. I'd do it again in a heartbeat."



L-R: Michele Ilene Ruiz, Alison Siegler, Katie Hill, Kristen Seeger, Asha Spencer, and Karen Schweickart