

# FOUR STUDENTS=

## Four Reasons to Study Law



Braco is a scientist at the Wisconsin Center for Space Automation and Robotics.

### BRATISLAV STANKOVIC '04

IT'S 11:30 A.M. on a Monday. Bratislav (Braco) Stankovic is knee-deep in a NASA-sponsored experiment growing mustard plants on the International Space Station. He has two hours to make a strategic decision about altering the plants' environment before he dashes off to his criminal procedures and property courses at the UW Law School. Braco, 38, is a father of a toddler and a pre-teenager, a husband, a world-class scientist, and a first-year law student. He is full of life.

When Braco (pronounced BRAH-tso) speaks of combining science and law, he appears anxious about the opportunities that might come his way. He wonders aloud if he's thwarting a successful science career by dedicating time to law school. He quickly reassures himself that the two disciplines complement each other. Critical thinking in science is sure to help his legal endeavors and vice versa. He suggests that as he wanders through his legal studies, he could easily find himself heading in a completely new direction—maybe even criminal law. Yet, like

any good scientist, Braco needs more hard data before he formalizes a plan. With only 10 credits under his belt, he guesses that Intellectual Property or Patent/Trademark might be the best fit for him, but he is keeping his mind open to all possibilities.

Braco isn't a traditional law student, but he says that he feels accepted by his peers and is very supported by the UW Law School faculty. He is a lead scientist at the Wisconsin Center for Space Automation and Robotics (WCSAR), a NASA-sponsored research center to "commercialize space," based out of the UW College of Engineering. He runs a lab dedicated to carrying out quality plant research in space. An excerpt from Braco's recent article in *Trends in Plant Science* magazine paints a picture of what his day job is like: "Successful space farming hinges upon reliable plant growth in controlled environments in microgravity—a complex task requiring challenging engineering designs. Issues such as air convection, microenvironment and power consumption become important." It is no small task to switch gears from gravitropism (the process of how plants sense and respond to gravity) to the rule of law, but Braco enjoys the challenge and seems comfortable balancing his chaotic schedule and wearing many hats.

Braco was born and raised in Macedonia. He came to the United States in 1991 to pursue a doctoral degree in plant molecular biology at the University of Nebraska. He's lived in four state capitals—Lincoln, Columbus, Raleigh and now Madison. He quickly adds that his family has enjoyed Madison the most. In fact, he considers it home and plans to stay here for the foreseeable future—at least through 2004 when he hopes to complete his law degree. "Madison is colorful, vibrant and progressive. That's what I like about it," he says as he looks out his lab window. A split-second later, there is a knock on his office door and he's back to the reality of a looming deadline. He smiles, gulps down his cup of coffee and rushes off to contact NASA. Just another day.

## HEIDI CARVIN '02

HEIDI CARVIN THRIVES on change. She jokingly refers to herself as a “novelty junkie” because of her passion for new challenges and her dislike of stagnancy. As a third-year UW Law School student (she just graduated this May), she finds her life to be anything but stagnant. She entered law school part-time four years ago, having established a career in education. She’s been an elementary schoolteacher, a gifted-and-talented program coordinator, a school principal, and currently is the Verona School District coordinator for several programs, including English as a Second Language (ESL).

Heidi’s desire to enter law school was sparked by an interest in alternative dispute resolution. In her 20-plus years in the schools, she has experienced her fair share of conflict—from unruly kids fighting on the playground to staff struggling with differences of opinion on report card formats. The law has been her answer. She has focused on three areas of study: alternative dispute resolution, labor law and school law (specifically special education). To Heidi, education and law are a perfect match. “Education is its own community and culture and is affected by the law in many ways.”

Heidi says that law school has improved her analytical reasoning and communication skills, which has enabled her to bring a fresh perspective to the school setting. She has even started to look at standard forms with a critical eye. For example, when she began overseeing the ESL program, she noticed that the forms, originally intended for use by foreign-language exchange students, hadn’t been revised to suit the rapidly growing ESL needs of the district.

Although Heidi’s busy schedule between work, home and school has prevented her from taking advantage of all that the law school has to offer, including study groups with other students and social activities, she feels very accepted. “There is a very diverse student body, in terms of age, ethnicity and gender. Just the visual impact puts people at ease. It is a very comfortable environment.”

In addition to seeking change in life, Heidi seeks balance. “Being a principal at an elementary school is full of emotion, and I like that, but I also needed intellectual stimulus. Law school has given me that balanced focus.” Entering law school while her two

**To Heidi, education and law are a perfect match. ‘Education is its own community and culture and is affected by the law in many ways.’**



**‘[At the UW Law School] There is a very diverse student body, in terms of age, ethnicity and gender. Just the visual impact puts people at ease.’**

children were in high school also helped her achieve balance at home. She says with a smile that she stayed involved with her children’s activities, but was busy enough with work and school to avoid “hovering” over their lives.

Heidi was born and raised in Brookfield and attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she earned a degree in education. She casually adds that if she could do it all over again, she’d major in horticulture. She has a green thumb and her yard is enough to prove it, with more than 200 varieties of hostas. In fact, she was the president of the Wisconsin Hosta Society for two years while attending law school. She manages it all because “gardening is therapy.” It appears to be working well. Heidi is calm, thoughtful, focused and ready to tackle a combined career in law and education.

## NATE RICE '04

IT'S NO SURPRISE that Nate Rice's favorite first-year law school course was Torts. Why? Because tort law is what aviation accident litigation is all about. Nate is a student on a mission. He's been on that mission since junior high when his grandfather took him to see the EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association) Fly-in show in Oshkosh. He has a fascination for airplanes, a background in aerospace engineering, and a passion for law school.

Nate doesn't stop smiling (except for the brief moment when he learned that the feature article required him to have his photo taken, but even then he was gracious). He's likable, smart, persistent and driven. He says that law school is fun. He likes his classmates. He credits the law school for offering lots of opportunity for social interaction. For Nate, the Wisconsin experience has been everything he thought it would be—and more.



**Nate and a team of engineers and mechanics in the Product Engineering Department of Cessna Aircraft Co. designed and built two new high-performance business jets.**

Nate studied aerospace engineering at the University of Minnesota before landing a job in the "Air Capital of the World"—Wichita, Kansas. (He sent his résumé to every aircraft manufacturer in the country). During his three years there, he and a team of 100-plus engineers and mechanics in the Product Engineering Department of Cessna Aircraft

Co. designed and built two new high-performance business jets. One of the youngest members of the team, Nate worked hard to find his niche. He had the ability to combine functionality with aesthetics.

"Engineers often focus on the functionality of aircraft and forget that it still needs to look good: it has to sell," he said. Aside from his eye for design, his key contributions at Cessna were his analytical skills and the ability to seek solutions quickly and independently. These qualities will serve him well as a lawyer.

After three years in Wichita, Nate was ready for a new challenge. A native of Sparta, he came home to Wisconsin and entered UW Law School. His goal is clear—to combine his interest in airplanes with the law. His options? Aircraft accident litigation or intellectual property (he wants to keep his options open, as aircraft litigation work isn't as widespread as IP work). He is well on his way.

Nate flew 1,000 miles to New York City in January for a 12-minute interview with one of the nation's premier law firms that exclusively practices aircraft accident litigation. Even more interesting is how he secured the interview. Late one night during the holidays, having sent out 66 résumés that semester, Nate sent e-mails to all eight members of the New York-based firm. To his amazement, one of the attorneys replied the next morning and invited him out for an interview sometime between January and June. Telling of his personality, Nate was on a flight within days. "I showed up a few minutes early for my 4 p.m. interview and was out the door by 4:07 p.m. People move really quickly out East. They waste no time!"

Nate obviously made a good impression in those precious few minutes. He was offered a clerkship in New York this summer and is still beaming from excitement. He credits his mock interview organized through the UW Law School Career Services Office with helping him prepare for interviewing.

Preparation and dedication have a lot to do with Nate's successes to date. But so does fate, he says. Nate's father—an attorney in Sparta for 30 years—gave him a book to read in undergraduate school. The author, former pilot turned lawyer Stuart Speiser, planted the seed. "Speiser literally wrote the book on this type of [aviation] litigation," Nate said. So, what is the name of the law firm where Nate is working this summer? Speiser Krause Nolan & Granito.

## JAMES WASHINAWATOK II '03

JAMES (OKWAHO) WASHINAWATOK II is a soft-spoken, second-year UW Law School student who knows what matters to him. He is a member of the Menominee and Mohawk tribes and is intent on using his legal education to help indigenous people. Like many of his peers, James can't pinpoint where his interests might take him. Ideally, he wants to be a voice for indigenous people and help advocate for what they want, "which is not necessarily what the federal government thinks is in their best interest."

James, 25, is president of the Indigenous Law Students Association (ILSA). He, and a core group of about six to 10 other Native American students, organized the annual Coming Together of the Peoples conference dedicated to raising the visibility of legal issues pertaining to tribes. The conference, held at the Pyle Center in February, included several well-known indigenous speakers and a program on Navajo peacekeeping methods, and culminated with a pow-wow.

With the success of the first banquet barely behind him, James and ILSA organized the Legal Education Opportunities (LEO) Banquet in March. LEO is the umbrella group for law student organizations of color, and the four constituent organizations rotate the responsibility of organizing the annual banquet. Each year the LEO Banquet celebrates the contribution the UW Law School to opening legal education to qualified students of all backgrounds and to diversifying the legal profession in Wisconsin, the nation and the world. Since ILSA had organized the banquet, James as its president emceed the evening.

James and two brothers were raised by their mother on the Menominee Indian Reservation in northeast Wisconsin. As a child growing up, he was called "Okwaho," which means "wolf" in Mohawk (his father's tribe) while his birth certificate is in the name of James. He now responds to either name. His mother encouraged him from a young age to value education, and he attended a private school on the East Coast for a year and a half, sponsored by A Better Chance (ABC). ABC, founded in 1963, provides educational opportunities to students of color with the talent and potential to excel academically through their recruitment and placement into some of the nation's most outstanding secondary schools.



**James is a member of the Menominee and Mohawk tribes and is intent on using his legal education to help indigenous people.**

James says that his experience at the private school helped him prepare for the studying required in college—something that he hadn't encountered at the reservation school.

James earned a bachelor's degree in Behavioral Science and Law, and a certificate in American Indian Studies, both at UW-Madison. He stayed in Madison for law school because of its native law program, and its closeness to home. After graduation, he will look for work outside of Wisconsin, potentially in the southwest where there is a higher population of native peoples. He is interested in working for a non-profit, human rights organization that serves indigenous people worldwide.

James has gained much from law school, in part because of all he has given to it. His thoughts on the role of ILSA capture his spirit well: "ILSA is dedicated to seeing that our people become self-sufficient and strive for a better life for tribal communities. This sounds very grandiose, so we'll stick to helping our fellow indigenous people get a higher education and become better human beings." ♦

—Trina E. Gray

*Trina E. Gray is a journalist and public relations professional who has worked most recently for the State Bar of Wisconsin.*