APPRECIATING THE FINE ART OF PARALEGAL STUDIES

Those who work in the legal field know life isn’t always pretty as a picture. Former art history professor Stephanie Lynne Wooster found this out the hard way.

Despite having a master’s degree in both fine art and art history, she could not find work in either field. Instead, she summoned her creativity to visualize a new path.

The complex nature of legal studies attracted the artist and inspired her to make the unusual career shift. Pursuing a master’s degree in Paralegal Studies expanded her professional skills, but also allowed her to focus on an area of interest she had never been able to pursue.

“I’ve had an interest in law since I was in graduate school for art history, where I took a class called ‘Art and the Holocaust’ that discussed legal issues dealing with art stolen during World War II by the Nazis,” Stephanie said. “I’ve been following Nazi-stolen art ever since and any sort of art-related legal issues.”

Seeing the Bigger Picture

Ignoring the plethora of certificate programs and tech schools in the market, Stephanie instead sought an advanced program that did more than provide a basic overview of the skills she needed to achieve her career goals. She didn’t want to just fit into the paralegal world — she wanted to advance it and see the bigger picture. The George Washington University online Master’s degree in Paralegal Studies provided the elevated approach to learning that she found enriching and enlightening.

“I was also looking for challenging classes and discussions about law that were not just about practical knowledge, but also addressed theoretical legal issues that stretched your mind,” she said. “A master’s degree is not just about learning practical skills to use at work. It’s also about employing the critical thinking and writing skills that the degree affords you to advance the paralegal field itself.”

Stephanie’s vision included a deeper understanding of key concepts she’d need to succeed, from effective litigation support to building a solid knowledge base in business law. She also wanted a program that fed her interest in international law. Perusing GW’s online Paralegal Studies master’s degree curriculum was like gazing at an academic mosaic of her future.
I especially liked the idea of taking classes with students who were already paralegals,” Stephanie said. “I wanted to stand out from the paralegals in my area who had local degrees from community colleges or tech schools,” Stephanie said. “I found that employers took a second look at my resume because of my GW degree, which led to many interviews with law firms.”

“A Global Network of Peers

As an outsider to the profession, Stephanie knew she could benefit tremendously from the discussions facilitated by her online master’s program. She met peers who were also new to the field to compare notes with and ask questions. Most helpful, though, were opportunities to engage with active paralegals who could fill in the blanks based on practical knowledge.

While her inexperience in the field made it challenging at first to adjust to the pace of the Paralegal Studies online program, once she hit her stride Stephanie found the curriculum rigorous and rewarding.

Working now with a growing Las Vegas law firm that recently went international, Stephanie enjoys a broad spectrum of prospects as she benefits from global contacts, which she said began at GW.

“GW graduates are located worldwide. Therefore, the resources and opportunities one has beyond graduation are immense,” she said.