Thinking Outside the Box
Merit Scholar Advocates for Entrepreneurship As a Way to Help Others

Allison Haar ’13

Thinking outside the box? Allison Haar ’13, a savvy entrepreneur who juggles running a tattoo parlor and traveling around the world on lucrative contract assignments for the software industry, has mastered the concept.

Now the Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Merit Scholarship recipient is setting her sights on a law career based on the same principle. Working with the Center for Law and Social Responsibility’s CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) Project has inspired her to consider nontraditional approaches to helping people with criminal records when she graduates, such as not charging her criminal defense clients and teaching for Venturing Out, Inc., a nonprofit that teaches entrepreneurship to incarcerated and court-involved adults and high-risk youth.

“There are ways of making money besides working for someone else,” she says. “If they work for themselves, no one will ask where they went to college or if they have a criminal background. I would love to practice pro bono criminal defense. If my business and contract work continue to go well, I will have an unbelievable opportunity to practice pro bono law.”

After graduating from Emerson College with a degree in media studies, she began her career recording voice software at a small tech start-up in Woburn, Massachusetts, which was later sold, and she chose not to accept the job offer that she received after the merger. It didn’t take Haar long to figure out that working on a contract basis was more profitable than being an employee. Last year, she took a leave from law school to work in Sweden and Denmark for three months, where she hired a staff and recorded 1,200 native speakers for a national software firm. She continues to schedule law school classes on three consecutive days to accommodate business travel (this semester to Croatia), and she keeps up her 3.27 grade-point average, often studying on transatlantic flights.
Haar also owns the tattoo parlor Regeneration, which she bought with a partner in 2008. A year later, the business was profitable and received accolades from Improper Bostonian magazine and a Boston Dig This Award; in 2011, Regeneration enjoyed its most profitable year to date. She is responsible for supervising seven employees and running the day-to-day operations.

“I employ a lot of people whom I trust, and I delegate much of the work,” she says. “They make it possible for me to be in law school.”

“That was an amazing moment,” Haar recalled, about meeting Justice O’Connor. “She is someone I have admired my whole life. She grew up in a time when women didn’t become lawyers.”

Her favorite courses are Lawyers as Entrepreneurs and Representatives of Entrepreneurs taught by Cary W. Sucoff ’77, adjunct professor of law; Evidence and Criminal Procedure taught by Professor David M. Siegel; and Trial Practice taught by Judge John J. Curran, Jr., adjunct professor of law. “The great thing about New England Law is that you learn how to practice,” she says.

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Cashing in the stock options from the start-up allowed her to lease and renovate a recording studio, Side Two, in Allston with a partner, Ryan Abbott. She also records local bands in the Side Two studio, and Haar and Abbott are now negotiating to buy the building. For fun, she plays electric guitar in a rock band called Eunuch that toured the East Coast, St. Louis, and Chicago in summer 2010.

Enrolling in New England Law has brought Haar's dream of practicing law full circle. In the third grade, dressed in a black robe, she gave an oral report on Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (retired), the first woman on the High Court. Haar was thrilled and grateful to be awarded a full-tuition Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Merit Scholarship at New England Law and, in her first year, to meet Justice O’Connor when she delivered the keynote address at Convocation in 2008, which marked the school’s Centennial.

“Courses in professional skills are a requirement. You have to have practical experience before the school gives you a degree. That’s really valuable.”

One of her projects for the entrepreneurs course was an eye-opening experience: developing a PowerPoint presentation for a company seeking venture-capital funding. “I’ve learned so much about what I’ve been doing wrong with my businesses,” she says. “It's interesting to see how to do things right.”

Has law school changed her? “I'm an impulsive person, and law school has harnessed that,” she says. “What law school has taught me is to focus on my best interests in the long term.”