

Speech by 2020 Brian M. Sax Prize Winner Savannah Reid '20

Thank you so much for this honor. I am so humbled to have been nominated, let alone selected as this year's Sax Prize Recipient. Thank you to the Sax family and the Prize Committee for their support of the Berkeley Law Clinical Program and clinical students like me.

I am so thrilled to be sharing this award with Bill Nguyen, and want to congratulate him on all his extraordinary work in the Youth Defender Clinic and the Death Penalty Clinic. Knowing that someone so brilliant, passionate, kind, and deeply committed to social justice work will be practicing law, gives me hope for the legal profession. Bill, you are a light at the law school, and it has been such a privilege to work alongside you in the Death Penalty Clinic this year.

I think I always knew I wanted to be a lawyer. But it was my experience working at a public defender's office prior to law school that confirmed that desire and drove me to apply to law school. In that role, I worked with a group of truly resilient young people transitioning home from long term custodial programs. I saw the ways in which these young people were not only being failed by the legal system, but by multiple systems simultaneously. And as a white woman from a privileged background, I knew that my identity allowed me to avoid being touched by these systematic failures in my own life. I felt that with a legal degree and a deeper knowledge of the law, I could do more to challenge and improve these systems in order to support people like the youth I had come to know and care so deeply for.

To that end, I simply saw law school as a means to an end. I wanted to get in, get the degree, and get back to the work. But, law school has been so much more than that, and that is largely because of my experience in clinics. In fact, as is true for so many Berkeley Law students, clinic has been the highlight of my law school experience. The work itself has challenged me—to think more creatively about how to solve complex problems, and to strengthen my writing and speaking skills to better fight for the causes I believe in. But even more importantly, clinic has given me the opportunity to interact with and learn from so many phenomenal people—my supervisors, clinical peers, and clients—all of whom have inspired me, believed in me, and helped me become a better advocate. As I approach graduation and reflect back on my three years at Berkeley Law, it is clinic that has ultimately taught me how to be a lawyer.

During my second and third years of law school, I was a member of the Policy Advocacy Clinic, a clinic working in states around the country to eliminate juvenile monetary sanctions #debtfreejustice. The bulk of my time with PAC was spent working in my home state of Nevada. Over the course of my second year, Team Nevada was able to successfully draft and pass legislation eliminating juvenile fees in the state. I am so incredibly grateful for the invaluable experience PAC gave me as just a second-year law student—coordinating with local organizations, conducting research, drafting legislation, and testifying before state representatives.

This experience not only exposed me to the complicated inner workings of the legislative and policy-making processes, but more importantly, to the various ways in which racist and

discriminatory practices are upheld and justified. Data shows that juvenile fee collection rates and revenue are low because most families with youth in the system simply cannot afford to pay. And it is clear that juvenile fees disproportionately harm low-income youth and families of color. Yet, even after sharing this data with local decisionmakers, the practice continued to be justified by some on the basis that fees would “hold youth accountable.” These justifications were clearly intended to maintain a system built on the oppression of minority communities and were yet another reminder of the necessity of ending debtor’s prisons.

I want to thank my partner in all of this, Dagen Downard. Dagen should really be accepting this award with me. It wasn’t just Dagen’s Nevada roots that made them the perfect partner for the work, but also their passion for seeking justice, unmatched work ethic, and eye for detail. Dagen, thank you for your patience and for pushing me to be a better teammate.

Thank you also to the PACFac. Thank you especially to Jeff and Stephanie, I don’t even know where to begin. You are two of the most competent, hardworking, and compassionate people I know. I am a better advocate and person because of the example that you both set for me. You have become more than supervisors to me—you are mentors, confidants, and friends. Thank you for trusting in and believing in me. Law school can often feel isolating and dehumanizing, but you made me feel seen, heard, and supported.

In my third year, I continued my work in PAC, and also joined the Death Penalty Clinic, where I worked with a group of students and lawyers seeking justice for an innocent man on death row. It is still hard for me to comprehend the complete inhumanity of putting a person on death row, let alone an innocent person. I was repeatedly confronted with that inhumanity as I combed through years of trial transcripts that clearly pointed to innocence, juxtaposed with years of unfavorable judicial opinions. But, the emotions that came with reading about our client’s case on paper was nothing compared to what I felt when I finally met him and his family in person, knowing that he had spent years on death row for a crime he did not commit. Knowing that his mother and children had spent over two decades without their father and son. Yet, as I sat across from him in that sweltering hot Alabama death row visiting room, my internal pessimism and frustration were met with his optimism and resilience. His faith and courage in spite of everything he’s experienced, have inspired me.

As for my DPC team: I don’t know how it’s possible, but somehow, after a year of working with an all-star team in PAC, I was fortunate enough to end up on yet another team of all-stars—collectively known as Team Johnson. Bakari, Safa, Ryan, Abbey, and Emma—you are all exceptional human beings and will make incredible lawyers. I have learned so much from your collective brilliance, and feel so fortunate to call you all friends.

And to Ty, Team Johnson’s supervisor and fearless leader: you have taught me how to lawyer creatively, shown me that it’s okay to be vulnerable in this work, and reminded me that everything is a choice. Thank you for everything.

To my friends outside of clinic—thank you for always cheering me on, celebrating me, and being another source of joy these past three years.

And, last but certainly not least, to my family. Thank you to my parents who have believed in me since day one. You have always inspired me to be the best version of myself and loved me unconditionally. I am forever indebted to you both. I love you very much.

To my husband, Jack: You are my rock and I wouldn't be here, were it not for you. Thanks for being a heavy lifter at home so I could focus on school. Thank you for your endless patience, consolation, love, and constant reminders to keep doing what I love and care about. You're simply the best part of my life.

Again, I am humbled and honored beyond words by this award. Thank you.