

Pet Talk: Lewis & Clark advanced law degree helps attorneys defend laws for paws

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Gieri Bolliger, who hails from Zurich, Switzerland, is the first international student to attend Lewis & Clark Law School's new LL.M. program in animal law.

Courtesy of Gieri Bolliger

Gieri Bolliger has been practicing animal law for 20 years in Zurich, Switzerland, but he came to Portland to gain some international perspective.

Bolliger, 45, directs an animal-welfare organization called the Foundation for the Animal in the Law (similar to our **Animal Legal Defense Fund**).

He's here in Portland pursuing his master's degree in animal law at at **Lewis & Clark Law School**, the only law school in the world to offer an advanced legal degree in the field.

"For me, this is really useful to have new input to see how it works here," he says, "because

the problems are the same, but there are other ways to approach these problems."

Animal cruelty and animal-welfare issues at factory farms are big issues in Europe just as they are here.

Learning how Americans deal with these issues can help him at his job in Switzerland, just as he hopes that his insight on European animal-welfare standards may influence his classmates stateside.

Bolliger is the first international student to attend the program, housed within the school's **Center for Animal Law Studies** in collaboration with the Animal Legal Defense Fund.

The LL.M. program celebrates its first full year of existence this month and officially opened to international students this fall.

Traditionally, U.S. law school LL.M programs offer attorneys from other countries the opportunity to study the American legal system and culture, says Natasha Dolezal, director of the Animal Law LL.M. Program at Lewis & Clark.

Studying abroad can be especially helpful for international attorneys who practice in areas that intersect with U.S. laws or who want to practice law in the United States.

Since animal law is one of the fastest-growing areas of law both nationally and worldwide, it made sense to open the program to people from other countries.

“As the field develops and grows, we recognize the importance of understanding animal law at the global level,” Dolezal says. “We want to help our students develop the skills to speak and cooperate on an international level.”

There are 147 law schools in the U.S. and Canada that have offered at least one course in animal law, according to the Animal Legal Defense Fund. In 1998, only about eight law schools offered animal law classes.

The universities of Basel and Barcelona now offer a doctoral and master’s program, respectively, but no other school offers a specialized advanced law degree in the field.

Many of the animal-law LL.M. students at Lewis & Clark have been out of law school anywhere from two to 20 years and are practicing in other areas of the field.

“They’ve been working for firms and practicing in civil litigation or insurance defense, and they’re not satisfied,” Dolezal says.

They include students like Sarah Cruse, a former defense litigation attorney who practiced law for five years in Chicago before joining the inaugural class last fall.



Sarah Cruse at a field trip to Out to Pasture Sanctuary in Estacada.
Courtesy of Sarah Cruse

Now, instead of focusing on insurance defense or medical malpractice suits, she’ll apply her abilities to research, write and advocate for farm-animal welfare and wildlife issues.

“I had wanted to continue being an attorney but go into a different direction,” says Cruse, 36. “This was a way to continue use my skills as an attorney but also pursue my passion.”

Cruse is currently doing an internship with the **ASPCA** in Washington, D.C.

She spoke while en route to New Jersey, where she’ll join a campaign working to override Gov. Chris Christie’s veto of a bill that would ban confinement of pregnant pigs in gestation crates.

Other students enter the Master’s program directly after earning their law degree, which is required in order to pursue an LL.M.

These students may have attended law schools that offered few or no animal-law courses.

With more than 30 courses focusing on animal law, Lewis & Clark’s program boasts the most comprehensive

animal law curriculum in the nation and the world, Dolezal says.

Courses include Animals in Entertainment, International Wildlife Law and Crimes Against Animals.

Other than a graduate seminar, the courses are the same as the ones offered to J.D. students who want to specialize in animal law and earn an Animal Law Certificate.

But while those students must also take classes that teach them the foundations of becoming a lawyer, the Master's program allows them to focus largely on animal law; at least 18 of 26 total credits must be in that area.

The program at Lewis & Clark opened up just as Phoenix native Martha Claire Howe was finishing her law degree at **Florida Coastal School of Law**. She entered the program last September and plans to graduate in December.



Martha Claire Howe came to Lewis & Clark's LL.M. program right after completing her J.D. degree at Florida Coastal School of Law.
Courtesy of Martha Claire Howe

"This was a good way to expand what I was already interested in," says Howe, 32.

Now she hopes to focus on humane education, which she describes as an area of educational reform encompassing human rights, environmental sustainability and animal welfare into a comprehensive school curriculum.

She'd like to work at a state Legislature or a humane education organization such as **Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers** (HEART).

Dolezal says the program can prepare students like Howe with the right background to pursue their passion and educate a new breed of attorneys who specialize in animal law.

"Our program didn't exist when they were law students and planning for their post-law school careers," she says. "They're now taking advantage of the opportunity to go back to school to earn this advanced degree and to use the LL.M. program as a bridge to cross into an area of law they are truly excited about."

Animal Law LL.M. at Lewis & Clark Law School: For more information about the program, call 503-768-6976.

--**Monique Balas**

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