by Rebecca Silver, '06

**Streetlaw, a student group that sends Law School students to Chicago classrooms, is a practical program of legal education that allows high school students to confront legal issues that affect their lives. Rebecca Silver is one of sixteen students who, working in mentor groups of four, bring their knowledge to Chicago youth through Streetlaw.**

She reports on her time in the program so far.

On Tuesday mornings I wake up before sunrise and pile into a car with three other members of Streetlaw. We arrive at Hubbard High School at 6:55 a.m., walk through the metal detector, up three flights of stairs, and into Mr. Fitz's law class. Twenty students sit in a classroom set up to look like a courtroom. Our challenge is to talk about the formal structure of the law—and to make the law real and relevant.

Our mentor group plans for each class by studying the assigned topic and finding ways to make it come alive for the students. We bounce ideas off each other, search in Lexis, and think back to our courses to find cases Mr. Fitz's students can compare to their own lives.

Whether we wind up introducing a case about drag racing or spilled coffee, the challenge of finding a link the students will grab hold of is both exciting and daunting. The process of creating a lesson has certainly given me a heightened respect for the work of my professors, who make it seem effortless.

The high-school students in Mr. Fitz's class are filled with common sense and energy. Their common sense leads them reach to a decision in each case or hypothetical; their energy allows them to turn their common sense on its head and see a different intelligent outcome. There is something remarkable about the look on a student's face when she reconsiders her gut reaction and has...
to say why it may not be the proper judgment. There is an equally remarkable look that appears on her face when I tell her that her argument was the crux of a powerful Supreme Court opinion.

Class ends at 7:50 a.m. and we drive back to Hyde Park. In my first class at the Law School, I'm ready to return to the role of a student, happy to be the one forced to question my gut reaction and articulate why it might be wrong.

One day this winter, dozens of Streetlaw students came to the Law School for a peek into the daily lives of their mentors. They toured the school, watched a mock appellate argument in which law students debated drug testing in schools, and asked questions to a panel of law students. They asked us how we chose to come to law school, whether it was hard to leave our families, and what difficulties we had to overcome to get to this point. I'm not sure which was more refreshing, hearing my fellow students tell their tales or watching the high school students' faces as they learned that we have all missed home and struggled with obstacles similar to their own.

The day ended with lunch in the Green Lounge, where mentors and students talked over pizza. The girls I sat with were filled with questions about college, leaving home, leaving friends, and choosing careers. When one girl asked whether people care about being "cool" after high school, I really had to think. I finally said that even in law school, people care about what others think of them, but the meaning of "cool" can change depending on your environment. I told her, "Here at the University of Chicago Law School, people can be cool because they say interesting things in class."

When I joined Streetlaw, I was expecting to help people and give back to my new community. The surprise, for me, is how much my students give to me.

Streetlaw began in 1972, when Georgetown University Law Center students initiated an experimental outreach program for inner-city Washington, D.C. high-school students. Their curriculum and a text, Street Law: A Course in Practical Law, have since been taught by students at law schools nationwide for academic credit, for pay, or as the objective of a student organization. Some form of Streetlaw currently exists at more than sixty American law schools.