The Law School’s first class of Rubenstein Scholars graduated last year—unburdened by mounds of law school debt, thanks to the full-tuition scholarship program made possible by two extraordinary gifts totaling $20 million from alumnus and University Trustee David M. Rubenstein, ’73.

The impact has been palpable: many said the program meant having the luxury to choose career paths that felt right—which is how Rubenstein has described feeling about the scholarship he received as a law student. He has said his scholarship enabled him to graduate debt-free, and that freedom allowed him to step away from law firm practice two years after graduation to pursue his interest in politics.

Rubenstein, the co-founder and Co-Chief Executive Officer of The Carlyle Group, a global private equity investment firm based in Washington DC, worked as chief counsel to a Senate subcommittee and was a domestic policy advisor to President Jimmy Carter. An influential philanthropist, he joined the University’s Board of Trustees in 2007.

His initial 2010 gift of $10 million, which was the largest contribution from an individual in the Law School’s history, was intended to fund merit scholarships for about 10 percent of the enrollment in three successive classes, beginning with the class of 2014. He renewed the gift in 2013 to cover about 60 students in the classes of 2017, 2018, and 2019.

We followed up with several from the first group of Rubenstein Scholars—many are clerking for federal judges—to find out what the program meant to them.
IGNACIO SOFO

Hometown: Bariloche, Argentina
Undergrad school and major: Pennsylvania State University, Mathematics and Philosophy
Activities/honors at the Law School: Latino/a Law Students Association, Law Review, and a championship-less IM soccer career

What did being a Rubenstein Scholar mean to you? It was interesting watching the program grow in the three years that we were in school. Our group was the initial set of Rubenstein Scholars, and by the time we graduated there were three full classes. I’m looking forward to the network that is going to be formed across the different years.

Why UChicago? The school combines a lot of the things I was looking for. It has a really dedicated faculty, small graduating classes, and a unique approach to studying law. It also helps that it is located in such a great city.

Who was your favorite Law School professor? Professor Baird. I enjoyed all the classes I took with him, but Corporate Reorganizations was by far my favorite class in law school. Professor Baird’s teaching style matched the class really well. All the students had already taken Bankruptcy, so he had free rein to pick a set of issues that explored why we’ve set up the world of reorganizations the way we did and how the rules reflect that. He was terrific in that class.

Where are you now? I am living in San Francisco and clerking for Judge Michelle Friedland of the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Where do you hope to be in 10 years? I like my office right now. Unfortunately, I don’t think they will let me stay beyond August.

What is your biggest accomplishment? Graduation.

Describe your Law School experience in six words: Great minds do not think alike.

KRISTIN CZUBKOWSKI

Hometown: New Berlin, Wisconsin
Undergrad: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Journalism and History
Activities/honors at the Law School: Member of the Law Review, member of the Housing Initiative Clinic, research assistant for Professor Lee Fennell, graduated with honors

What did being a Rubenstein Scholar mean to you? I feel incredibly privileged to be a Rubenstein Scholar. Having the scholarship removed one very large source of stress from my law school experience—financial concerns—and gave me the freedom to approach law school the way I wanted to.

Why UChicago? In short, I chose the University of Chicago Law School because it felt right. When I visited the campus, I quickly got the impression that it was a challenging (some would even say rigorous), but intimate, place to learn. Overall, I think that first impression was accurate.

Who was your favorite Law School professor? My favorite professor at the Law School is Professor Fennell. I took three classes with her and worked as her research assistant, and I find her so intelligent and impressive, but also a compassionate and dedicated teacher. I also want to make special mention of Professors Strahilevitz and LaCroix for their mentorship of me in law school.

Where are you now? I currently live in Lawrence, Kansas, and work as a law clerk for a federal judge. I will return to Chicago next year to work at a law firm.

Where do you hope to be in 10 years? I’m keeping my options open for the future—I’m excited to start my law firm job, but one of my passions before law school that remains with me is city government and policy, and that is a passion I would still love to pursue at some point.

What is your biggest accomplishment? Probably graduating from the Law School, but I’m also incredibly proud of the work I did in my three years as a local government journalist in Madison, Wisconsin.

Describe your Law School experience in six words: Intellectually challenging (and humbling!). Personally enlightening.
COURTNEY COX

Hometown: Bristol, Rhode Island
Undergrad: Yale University, double major in Ethics, Politics, & Economics and Engineering Sciences, Electrical. Also completed graduate work in philosophy at Oxford (BPhil/DPhil)
Activities/honors at the Law School: Law Review; Pro Bono Service Initiative; Young Center for Immigrant Children’s Rights; China Law Society, Co-President; Law School Musical Pit Band; China International Immersion Program. Honors: Highest Honors; Order of the Coif; Kirkland & Ellis Scholar; The Edwin F. Mandel Award for Exceptional Contributions to the Law School’s Clinical Education Program.
What did being a Rubenstein Scholar mean to you? Being a Rubenstein meant having the opportunity to join a community within an already excellent community. I was very impressed by my class of Rubensteins, a group of very intelligent, but humble, people who were a pleasure to be around.
Why UChicago? When I visited, I was blown away by the intellectual curiosity, engagement, and dedication of the faculty—to their work, the students, and each other. The Rubenstein made it an easy decision.
Who was your favorite Law School professor? They were all stellar—please don’t make me choose!
Where are you now? I’ve just moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and work as a law clerk on the First Circuit Court of Appeals.
Where do you hope to be in 10 years? I hope to still be working on challenging legal problems, whether in the service of the academy or clients.
What is your biggest accomplishment? I once got Professor Levmore to permit me to offer a hypothetical in 1L Torts. He had just finished recounting a story about fishing, and when he tried to cut me off, I responded that he had just finished a story, and now it was my turn. In all seriousness, I am proud of my work helping Chinese immigrant children through the Young Center and only regret I did not join it sooner.
Describe your Law School experience in six words: A rigorous challenge, with engaging people.

KAREN LEUNG

Hometown: Brampton, Ontario, Canada/Hong Kong, China
Undergrad: Columbia University, English and Comparative Literature
Activities/honors at the Law School: The Young Center for Immigrant Children’s Rights; Salzburg Cutler Fellows Program
What did being a Rubenstein Scholar mean to you? Freedom to choose.
Biggest Accomplishment: Helping with a case at the National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago during my 1L summer. The client won her residency after fighting her case for 12 years.
Who were your favorite Law School professors? Laura Weinrib, Elizabeth Frankel, and Tom Ginsburg. They really care about teaching, and they take an interdisciplinary view. And they are very nice.
Where are you now? New York, New York. I work as a law clerk in the restructuring group at Dechert LLP.
Where do you hope to be in 10 years? Making a difference on policy issues such as US asylum law.
What is your biggest accomplishment? Helping with a case at the National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago during my 1L summer. The client won her residency after fighting her case for 12 years.
Describe your Law School experience in six words: Tough, rewarding, once-in-a-lifetime.
Cafaro Scholar: “I Try Harder Because It’s for Her”

Constance Grieves’s law school experience would have been different without Debra Cafaro.

For starters, without the full-tuition Cafaro Scholarship, Grieves, ‘16, might not be at Chicago Law; “I’d probably have opted for a lesser school,” she said. Either way, she’d most likely be juggling classes and a job, just as she did during her undergraduate years at Middle Tennessee State University and a community college. And, although she doesn’t think she would have strayed entirely from her plan to pursue criminal defense work, law school debt undoubtedly would have influenced, and probably limited, her postgraduate choices.

“I’m really happy, and so grateful, not to be in the position of having to make that decision,” said Grieves, one of the first recipients of an award made possible by the $4 million that Cafaro, ’82, donated to the Law School in 2013. In addition to being a cum laude graduate of the Law School, Cafaro is a University trustee and the Chairman and CEO of Ventas, Inc., a Chicago-based real estate investment trust.

“This is the only time since I was 16 that I haven’t worked—it’s blowing my mind,” Grieves said. “As a result, I’ve been able to focus on being a good student and getting the skills I need to be a good lawyer. It’s alleviated a lot of stress.”

Cafaro’s gift established a program that will allow 22 students with substantial financial need to attend the Law School at no cost—four in the Class of 2016, and three in each of the following six classes. Cafaro was the first member of her family to attend college, and she has said that her Law School degree was a critical foundation for her business career.

“She has such a presence. She’s a powerful woman, and you can just feel it before she even says a word,” said Grieves, who had dinner with Cafaro and her family last year. “She’s impressive.”

Grieves, 33, comes from a family that emphasized getting a job after high school rather than going to college. But her older sister, who now has a PhD, had chosen to continue her education, becoming the first college graduate in the family. She pushed Grieves to do the same.

“I always told her I couldn’t afford it,” Grieves said. But when she was 25, Grieves enrolled in community college then transferred to a state school, paying her tuition with money she earned waiting tables. From the beginning, she knew she wanted to help people, and “the law is a very powerful tool,” she said.

She began to think about going to law school, sometimes discussing her aspirations with a federal defender who was a regular at the steakhouse where she worked. The lawyer encouraged her, and he put in a good word when she applied as an undergraduate for an internship at the federal public defender’s office in Nashville, where he worked. She landed the role—and felt a connection to the work. One case that particularly touched her involved a man who had been charged with felony possession of a firearm.

“It was a terrible injustice—there was no real evidence to tie him to the crime,” she said. “We worked really hard on the case, and I was able to work closely with his attorney. We got an acquittal, which was the best feeling of my life.”

Now that she’s at the Law School, Grieves is able to devote herself to realizing her dream, serving on the boards of Defenders and the Chicago Law Foundation, doing pro bono public defense work, and working on the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic. But the scholarship’s impact is one that extends beyond the financial assistance.

“To have someone invest in me like this really means a lot,” Grieves said. “I’m someone who has always paid my own way for everything. Now I think I actually try harder because it’s for her. On some level, I want to make Debra Cafaro proud and to have her know that her money was well spent.”
Hometown: Tempe, Arizona
Undergrad: Brigham Young University, Philosophy
Activities/honors at the Law School: The Federalist Society, Vice President of Faculty Relations; J. Reuben Clark Law Society, Student Chair of Service and Outreach Committee; Dallin H. Oaks Society, Vice President; and The Edmund Burke Society

What did being a Rubenstein Scholar mean to you? It was an incredible blessing. It also felt like a unique legacy: at BYU I was a research assistant for David Paulsen, ’64, who attended Chicago Law on a full-tuition scholarship. In turn, while in law school, Paulsen was a research assistant for Dallin Oaks, ’57, who also attended Chicago on a full-tuition scholarship. While I have always felt a need to use my talents wisely, Rubenstein’s gift and my connection to this unique legacy make me keenly aware of my responsibility to help others and excel in my field.

Why UChicago? Without a doubt, I chose Chicago because of the Rubenstein Scholarship. I was set on going elsewhere until I received the offer. While I was attracted by the focus on law and economics at Chicago, I was hesitant to join a school that felt so academically inclined after years studying philosophy. I’m grateful, however, that I was able to get the exposure to economics that I may not have received elsewhere.

Who was your favorite Law School professor? Picking a favorite is impossible! I have fond memories of so many of my professors. My favorite class, however, was easily Elements of the Law with Richard McAdams. I distinctly recall feeling, on several occasions, that I should stand up and applaud when McAdams finished his lecture. A feat indeed on those dreary Friday afternoons.

Where are you now? I currently live in Phoenix, Arizona. I’m working as a property manager, looking for a career in the law, and trying my hand at some other alternatives to the law.

Where do you hope to be in 10 years? My vision for the next ten years has shifted considerably since I started law school. At this time, I simply hope to excel in my career and be relatively happy.

What is your biggest accomplishment? When I was just a month shy of 16, I hiked across Costa Rica, from coast to coast, with complete strangers. I fell ill from the water, became dehydrated, and suffered hallucinations; to this day, I don’t think I’ve been nearer to death than on that trip. Four of the nine in our group gave up, but our small group of five made it. I can hardly imagine a better feeling than what I felt sitting in the waters of the Pacific after the last day of that ordeal.

Describe your Law School experience in six words: Growth, but not as I expected.
HILLEL NADLER

Hometown: Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Undergrad school and major: Harvard University, Philosophy
Activities/honors at the Law School: Law Review, Jewish Law Students Association, Order of the Coif, Kirkland & Ellis Scholar
What did being a Rubenstein Scholar mean to you? It meant that the Law School had made a commitment to me and was invested in my success at law school and afterward.
Why UChicago? Because I wanted, in the words of one alum I talked to when I was making the decision, to “get an education, not just a credential.” Students and faculty at the Law School seemed to exhibit a completely unique commitment to scholarship (and this turned out to be the case). I was also drawn in by the Law School’s interdisciplinary bent.

Who was your favorite Law School professor? If forced to choose just one, Douglas Baird. Every Baird class is a performance. And not many professors would invite a study group out to lunch on a Sunday at the last minute to discuss the correct measure of expectation damages for breach of a forward contract (Missouri Furnace).
Where are you now? Chicago. I’m clerking for Judge Frank Easterbrook of the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.
Where do you hope to be in 10 years? I hope to be doing something that is both personally fulfilling and intellectually engaging.
What is your biggest accomplishment? Making it through the second year of law school with a 0–6-month-old infant—though most of the credit for that accomplishment goes to my wife and friends at the Law School who helped me stay afloat.
Describe your Law School experience in six words: Having fun is a deadweight loss.

DAVID KING

Hometown: Cincinnati, Ohio
Undergrad: University of Dayton, Biochemistry
Activities/honors at the Law School: Law Review, Articles Editor; Kirkland and Ellis Scholar; Order of the Coif; Highest Honors
What did being a Rubenstein Scholar mean to you? Being a Rubenstein Scholar has meant having the luxury of not being financially constrained when choosing jobs and thinking about a career path.
Why UChicago? The Rubenstein scholarship played a big role, as did the strong reputation of the school and faculty.
Who was your favorite Law School professor? Too many good ones to choose.
Where are you now? I live in Washington, DC, and am clerking for Judge David S. Tatel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.
Where do you hope to be in 10 years? It changes every week.
What is your biggest accomplishment? Prior to law school I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Mozambique, where I taught chemistry and English to high school students. Doing that for two years was both immensely rewarding and challenging.