



Paths and Connections

Nizhone Meza is a BYU Law School alumna, a wife, a mother of six children, a member of the Navajo Nation, and an advocate in the nonprofit sector. The Clark Memorandum recently sat down with her to learn more about the path that led her to the BYU Law School, her experience at BYU Law, and how her law degree has shaped her life.

Nizhone Meza's path to law school began when she was getting a master's degree in social work. During an internship with the Division of Child and Family Services, she remembers sitting in a courtroom as parents made their cases to prevent their children's removal or to regain custody. Meza noticed that it was most often the attorney, not the social worker, who handled the advocacy in these cases, and she began to understand

the importance of the law and the legal process, especially in advocating for those who either did not understand the process or did not have the skills to advocate for themselves.

As a result, Meza realized she wanted to study law. But the timing was not quite right, so after completing her master's degree, she took a job with a social services agency doing adoption work. As she interacted with birth mothers and adoptive parents, Meza

again felt the desire to obtain a law degree. But the timing still wasn't right.

A few years later, while teaching elementary and middle school in Utah, Meza became the Title VII Indian education coordinator for the district. She recalls one particular Indian education meeting in which other coordinators stressed the "need for our Native youth to believe in themselves and live up to what they're capable of so they can help our tribal

"One thing I really loved about my commute to BYU every day was coming down the hill into the Heber Valley and seeing the mists over the Deer Creek Reservoir rising up on Timpanogos. It filled my soul to where I felt that I could do whatever it was that I needed to do. Law school was hard, as anybody who's gone through law school can tell you. But those sights, those connections, those feelings driving through the canyon, . . . the leaves as they change . . . —just being able to see it on a daily basis really filled my spirit."

—NIZHONE MEZA

communities and tribal nations succeed.” Meza says, “We talked about the strength in our culture, the strength in our resilience, the strength in our families and in our indigenous ties. When I heard these things, I thought about my dream of going to law school, and I knew I needed to do something about it.”

Becoming an Advocate

So she did. Meza applied for and was accepted to the BYU Law School. Because she had a two-year-old daughter when she began her studies, attending BYU felt like the right place to be. “I knew I would be cared about as an individual,” she says. “I don’t want to say that another law school wouldn’t have been responsive to that, but I did know what BYU was about, and I did know that about half of the students in my class were married and there were many who had children. That gave me comfort when I was making my decision.” She also appreciated the learning environment: “[BYU has] a feeling there that I didn’t necessarily feel elsewhere,” she says.

As Meza considered an area of focus during her first year, she knew she needed to work in places that affected tribal communities, but she resisted those thoughts. So rather than initially heading down one specific path in law school, she told herself, “Just learn to become the best lawyer [you] can.” Still, law school was challenging, as she spent the long days being a law student, wife, and mother with a one-hour commute each way between school and home. What kept her going, she says, “was knowing that whatever I was going to do was going to serve [my family] and that I would try to serve my people.”

During Meza’s 2L year, she ran into a former peer from her undergraduate days, Paul Tsosie, who was a BYU Law alum. Although she had no intention of searching out an externship, she jokingly asked him if he had work for her. Tsosie, who provides counsel for various Utah tribes, answered that he did, and Meza was given an opportunity to work on tribal issues. On one trip to a nearby reservation for a tribal council meeting, Meza was reminded “of going to my tribe back home, being amongst our tribal elders. My grandfather was a medicine man. My grandmother served with the archives. The feelings that I would get listening to the elders and tribal council members on the reservation as they spoke not only reminded me of my grandparents but also gave me hope that I could actually serve tribal communities such as mine doing things of a legal nature.”

Later in law school Meza worked for the BYU Office of General Counsel, and she gained experience that became invaluable when she later became a legal fellow for a Utah nonprofit organization. She also took a research assistant position with Professor Lisa Sun. “She’s genuine, kind, and smart,” Meza says. “I felt that the ability to talk with professors and to be able to learn from them was amazing. I could go through the names of so many professors and tell you what kind of difference they made.”

Connecting Two Worlds

Law school forced Meza to draw more connections between her experiences and background. “I grew up in two worlds and never really belonged to either,” she says. “I understand the traditional way of thinking, but my

strengths are the Western way of thinking because that is the world I operate in 90 percent of the time.” In her property class as a 1L, she came to see how important and influential the other 10 percent of her life was because she viewed property rights differently than her classmates. Consequently, Meza is quick to acknowledge the help of her family, friends, and colleagues in her journey but is especially grateful for her heritage. She says, “I keep looking back to my ancestors and my grandparents and the work that they did and the teachings that they passed on. I still look up to them, even though they’re not here with me anymore. I look up to my grandmother for her work in teaching and preserving our Native language; she wasn’t afraid to stand up and speak her mind. For me, she’s been a hero.”

After graduation Meza received a BYU Law fellowship to work with a nonprofit organization. She was able to explain to state leaders how a tribal organization’s position was based on traditional Native beliefs and why they held the positions they did. Meza’s advocacy lies in bringing together two worlds and giving a voice to those without a voice.

Meza’s advice to current law students, prospective law students, and attorneys who are interested in pursuing a career working with tribes or advocacy groups involves being culturally sensitive and understanding tribal sovereignty. She emphasizes the need to not only understand the issues that impact Native Americans but to try to get to know them as individuals and learn to see things from their point of view. “My view comes from my experience, and I am open to seeing someone

else’s view,” Meza says. “I do know where I stand, but I try not to be so confident or arrogant as to think I know it all. I think it’s important that people approach work with tribes with a mindset of being willing to learn and work with people.”

Advocacy is important to Meza, especially advocacy for her heritage. She is particularly passionate about the need for tribal environmental advocacy groups to bring harmony to the two worldviews. “There are 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Our ancestral lands contain our sacred spaces. They contain remnants of who we were and who we are. These lands are important for individual, mental, spiritual, and emotional wellness. We look for harmony. Tribal members are connected to their ancestral lands; we still do ceremonies in those places,” she says. “I never liked studying history, because it was so painful. There are so many events in history where people have let emotion drive decisions instead of thinking of what’s truly best in the holistic sense. We should be focused on actions that bring harmony to people and the earth, and in some situations that begins with actions that promote healing. We should be doing our part to take care of ecological wellness, and then Mother Earth will do what she needs to do to protect herself.”

When asking Esther to advocate for her people before the king, Mordecai said to her, “And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). Like Esther, Meza has taken a path that connects two worlds as she serves her communities and creates dialogue and opportunities for holistic solutions.



Gayla Moss Sorenson



Stacie A. Stewart



K. Marie Kulbeth



Rebecca Walker Clarke

PHOTOS BY BRADLEY SLADE

A P P O I N T M E N T S A N D

Assistant Dean of External Relations

Gayla Moss Sorenson, '85, has been selected as the new assistant dean of external relations, a position focused on strengthening BYU Law students, alumni, and J. Reuben Clark Law Society (JRCLS) members. Dean Sorenson is best known to current BYU Law students and recent alumni for her role as the Law School's assistant dean of admissions.

"The opportunity to work at BYU Law has been an incredible capstone to a meaningful, fulfilling career," Dean Sorenson shares. "As dean of admissions, I loved describing the outstanding BYU Law community, including the J. Reuben Clark Law Society, to prospective students. In my new role, I am excited to be more closely engaged with that service-oriented, high-achieving community of alumni and Law Society members."

Dean Sorenson is also known for her previous volunteer work as chair of the JRCLS Finance Committee and as a senior fellow for BYU Law's International Center for Law and Religion Studies. She has, throughout her legal career, maintained a passion for the Law School and the JRCLS, as has been highlighted by her service.

After graduating from BYU Law, Dean Sorenson spent 4 years with Lewis & Roca in Phoenix, Arizona, and then 20 years with Motorola—first as a litigator, followed by extensive experience as a commercial attorney supporting global transactions, and then as a vice president and senior legal advisor. She was the director of global compliance operations for Biomet Inc., an international medical device company based in Warsaw, Indiana, at the time she was selected as the BYU Law dean of admissions.

The alumni association, JRCLS, and BYU Law community will benefit greatly from the experience and passion that Dean Sorenson brings to her new role.

Assistant Dean of Admissions

BYU Law is pleased to welcome Stacie A. Stewart, '14, as its new assistant dean of admissions. Dean Stewart looks forward to the opportunity to share her passion for both the law and the Law School in her new position.

"I am thrilled to be joining the admissions team . . . to share my enthusiasm for law with prospective students," she says. "My vision for admissions is to increase the reach of our recruiting efforts to further enrich our already amazing student body."

Prior to entering law school, Dean Stewart obtained a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in educational

leadership from Utah State University. She then spent 15 years working as a teacher and administrator for the Cache County School District in North Logan, Utah. A class titled "Legal Issues in Education" was required for her master's degree, and it sparked her interest in attending law school.

Dean Stewart is also passionate about increasing opportunities for women in the legal profession. During her time as a law student, she was president of BYU's Women in Law organization, and she went on to become a member of the board of Women Lawyers of Utah.

After graduation Dean Stewart clerked for the Honorable Judge Andrew J. Kleinfeld of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in Fairbanks, Alaska, and then for the Honorable Judge Ted Stewart of the U.S. District Court for the District of Utah in Salt Lake City.



R E T I R E M E N T S

Following her clerkships, she entered private practice in the commercial real estate section of Parr Brown Gee & Loveless in Salt Lake City. As she leaves that position, she looks forward to working with colleagues from the networks of BYU Law alumni and the JRCLS to find and identify strong potential law students from around the country.

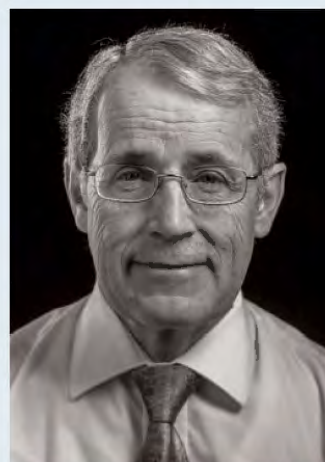
Assistant Dean of Communications

K. Marie Kulbeth, '10, has been selected as BYU Law's assistant dean of communications, a position focused on furthering the Law School's mission by increasing its ability to influence legal education, the legal profession, and the law in positive and meaningful ways. The Communications Department is responsible for media relations, website design, the *Clark Memorandum*, the annual report/magazine, social

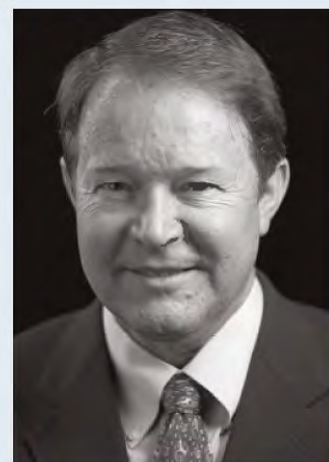
media, marketing, and brand management.

Dean Kulbeth originally returned to the Law School as its director of admissions. In that position she worked with Dean Sorenson to expand the reach of recruiting efforts not only through traditional means but also via social media and other platforms. As she focused on developing strategies to use technology to reach wider audiences, she developed a passion for sharing the Law School's story.

"As the director of admissions, I realized the breadth of innovation in clinical and other opportunities and the depth of scholarship being produced by our professors," she says. "I found myself telling the story of the Law School and its work not only to potential students but also to alumni and JRCLS members. In my new role, I look forward to the opportunity to increase the



Steven E. Averett



Lynn D. Wardle

positive impact of BYU Law and the JRCLS through sharing more widely the message of their service, scholarship, and excellence."

Dean Kulbeth clerked for the Honorable Judge W. Eugene Davis on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in her home state of Louisiana. She then practiced business litigation in Salt Lake City at Strong & Hanni PC. As a law student, she explored her interest in nonprofit and international issues through work with immigration and United Nations organizations. Dean Kulbeth has maintained those interests as pro bono counsel, a volunteer with the Utah Court Appointed Special Advocate program, and a coach for the Jessup International Moot Court team.

Editor for the Clark Memorandum

Rebecca Walker Clarke is the new managing editor of the

Clark Memorandum. Clarke joins the publication team at the Law School after more than 15 years teaching English at Brigham Young University. She looks forward to continuing the legacy of her predecessor, Jane Wise, who is now an associate director at the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, in creating an outstanding publication.

RETIREMENTS

As a law librarian at the Howard W. Hunter Law Library, Steven E. Averett supervised collection maintenance and taught legal research. He began working at BYU Law in 1997.

The Bruce C. Hafen Professor of Law, Lynn D. Wardle began working at BYU Law in 1978. He specialized in family law and bioethics; taught constitution law, family law, and conflict of law; and defended marriage in several legal venues.

On Leadership and Law: The Wisdom of Five Deans

Excerpts from a panel of former BYU Law School deans, held August 31, 2017, at the Little America Hotel in Salt Lake City for the annual Founders Day celebration

At the 2017 Founders Day dinner, Dean D. Gordon Smith hosted a panel of five former deans of the J. Reuben Clark Law School: Elder Bruce C. Hafen, H. Reese Hansen, President Kevin J. Worthen, James D. Gordon III, and James R. Rasband. Dean Smith asked the former deans questions ranging from how they determined guiding principles for the Law School as its mission unfolded to what legacies were left by Carl S. Hawkins and Rex E. Lee—two former BYU Law deans who have passed away.

One of the questions Dean Smith asked addressed the effect of law school on leadership: “Many of you have talked about leadership training and how one of the purposes of the Law School is to train leaders for the university, the Church, and communities. . . . [What] is it that connects legal training with leadership?”

The following are excerpts from the panel’s responses.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen

We live in a society that is so polarized on so many issues that what passes for civil discourse—let alone analytical thinking—is somebody shouting on one extreme and someone else cursing on the other. It’s unsettling to me. . . . We need thoughtful, careful analysis and prayerful consideration of very complicated problems. And the kind of leaders we need in the

Church and in law firms and on school boards and in PTAs and in corporate boardrooms are people who will not polarize and just shout from the extremes but who can deal with really difficult problems. Law school offers that training, and at the BYU Law School, it is offered with a complete eternal perspective that you will not find anywhere else.

H. Reese Hansen

I think the Law School is the beneficiary of leadership training that occurs in other venues. So many students who attend have come up through the Church. And every one of them, by the time they get to law school, has served in a variety of capacities from the time they were 12 years old until they were 22 years old and coming home from their missions. They’ve all been practiced at leadership, and they bring that to the table. Then we do our best to teach them how to think critically and to write well and to articulate ideas and to take positions without being offensive and to do all the things that we try so hard to teach in law school. That’s a pretty irresistible combination of attributes brought to the BYU Law School, and then the Law School adds to those attributes.

President Kevin J. Worthen

Let me just share two thoughts about leadership: *process* and



deliberation—two words that lawyers quickly get familiar with. There’s power in terms of the *process* of being fair to people, of listening to them—the kinds of things we see in diminished quantities now. I think developing these processes is a really important lesson that’s learned in law school. And then *deliberation*—what we might call in a Church setting “counseling together”—is another key thing in terms of leadership. It’s the ability to deliberate with one another and exchange ideas without necessarily even defending the ideas. Particularly in a law school setting, you have a lot of deliberation happening, which really contributes to outstanding leadership.

James D. Gordon III

Two ways I think a legal education has special contributions are in teaching analytical skills and teaching skills of communication and persuasiveness. It’s important to do the analysis before you try to persuade other people. That’s usually the preferred order. I clerked for Judge [Monroe G.] McKay, and I used to tease him and say that he didn’t know how he felt about his subject until after he’d

heard what he had to say on the matter. But the truth is that he’s just so quick that I couldn’t think as fast as he did.

James R. Rasband

I’ve talked about law and leadership so much because I really do think that, at its core, law is a leadership degree. From the very first day of law school we’re trained to think like leaders in important ways. . . . Treating like cases alike is an important leadership skill. When studying standards of review, we think we might just be memorizing whether we’re going to apply clear error or abuse of discretion or de novo review, but in fact, what we’re learning over and over and over is, How do I judge something that is brought to me? Should I defer, or is this something important enough that I have to treat it de novo? Is it fact based? Such thinking is a leadership skill. Listening to another person with empathy, which lawyers are trained to do, is a leadership skill. Taking account of reliance interest, which is drilled into us from our first year, again, is a leadership skill. . . . The things that we learn mechanically in law school train us up as leaders.