

## Thinking Globally: A Passion for Justice and the World

**Alison Peck** started thinking globally at a young age. When she was five years old, she began learning Spanish. Then, she enrolled in French classes.

“For as long as I can remember, I’ve always been really frustrated by language barriers,” Peck explained. “I didn’t like the idea of being separated from people because we speak different languages.”

As a high school student, Peck spent a summer in Mexico, immersed herself in the culture, and returned home fluent in Spanish. A few years later, after graduating from Yale Law School, Peck put her French proficiency to the test as a clerk in Luxembourg at the Court of Justice for the European Communities.

Now, Peck encourages WVU Law students to think globally in her roles as professor and director of international programs.

In the classroom, Peck teaches international trade and international environmental law and is known for engaging her students with real-world legal projects. She is also the adviser of the International Law Area of Emphasis.

Outside of class, Peck oversees the McDougall Visiting Professorship in International Law, which brings foreign legal scholars to the College, and she helps lead the summer study abroad programs in Mexico, Switzerland, and Brazil.

After her first trip with law students to Brazil in 2011, Peck arranged to return to the country for a few weeks to learn Portuguese — adding proficiency in a third foreign language to her abilities.

Peck uses her role at WVU Law to promote international law opportunities inside and outside the College. Her goal is to show prospective and current students, alumni and practicing attorneys in West Virginia that if they are interested in international law or global issues, they can pursue those interests at WVU.

“There are a lot of opportunities to develop a career in international subjects at WVU and the law school,” said Peck. “The only qualifier to participate in international law, or any international discussion really, is to be a citizen of the world, and Morgantown is part of the world.”

One way Peck is helping WVU students become citizens of the world is through a study abroad course in Uganda. This summer, law and undergraduate students from the College of Business and Economics will have the opportunity to spend two weeks in Kampala, Uganda, at Bajjuoko High School.

While there, the WVU students will serve while developing and implementing entrepreneurship and

sustainable development projects to improve the high school. The experience is designed to prepare WVU students for careers in community development. It is offered in conjunction with the Bajjuoko Foundation, an organization created by Peck, Ugandan-born WVU graduate Job Kasule (Ph.D. ’12) and colleague Sadhat Walusimbi.

Peck is also founding editor of the International Trade Law Profs Blog, which is part of the Law Professor Blog Network. She’s had a lot to write about, starting with the 2016 United States presidential election.

It was during the presidential campaign that Peck became concerned about what the outcome could mean for the world, especially for immigrants in the U.S. If the campaign promises and rhetoric became

government policy, Peck knew she had to do something to help immigrants, she said.

“It’s important to remember that immigrants have rights, and many have legal avenues to stay in this country,” explained Peck. “These people deserve fairness and they deserve decent treatment while they are here. They need to be heard. That’s what we, as lawyers, can do for them.”

Peck’s opportunity to help came last year when the College was looking for new leadership of its Immigration Law Clinic.

“I thought about the immigration crisis that I knew we would be facing, and I thought about all my relevant

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experience that would make me a good fit for this position,” Peck recalled.

That experience includes working in administrative law — immigration law is heavily administrative — and practicing international arbitration and commercial litigation with Boies, Schiller & Flexner LLP in Washington, D.C., before her teaching career.

With these credentials in hand, Peck was appointed director of the Immigration Law Clinic starting in fall 2017, and she added it to her international responsibilities at the College.

The clinic provides pro bono legal representation for clients throughout West Virginia with immigration-related inquiries or who may be at risk for deportation (see story on page 31).

“There are a variety of people who need legal advice on topics surrounding immigration. The clinic gets calls every day,” Peck explained. “Particularly now, the landscape is changing underneath them and there is tremendous uncertainty. People are really frightened, and the immigration agencies in West Virginia have been aggressive.”

For many law students, the clinic is an eye-opening experience when they connect with real people who are in situations they’ve only seen on the news. According to Peck, some students have deep moments of self-reflection when they see how their clients are treated by federal agencies or when their clients are stereotyped based on their nationalities.

“A lot of what our clients are facing are just human experiences, and the students learn and grow as lawyers when they try to relate to clients and what they’re going through,” said Peck. “Immigration lawyers aren’t out to get around the legal system to help people stay here. Lawyers are out to make sure their clients are treated fairly within the legal system while they are here, and having compassion helps them do that.”

Like puzzle pieces, Peck’s personal and professional interests in the world have joined together. Her childhood fascination with the world and languages that grew into a love of travel, international law and justice have led her to a multifaceted role at WVU Law — to the benefit of everyone involved. ♡



Photos Submitted

(above) Alison Peck visiting an indigenous village along the Rio Negro in the Amazon; (below) WVU graduate Job Kasule (Ph.D. '12) with Alison Peck and Bajjuuko High School students in Uganda.

