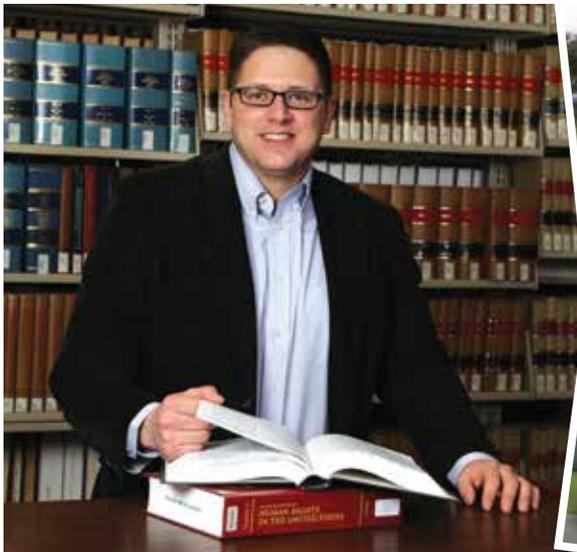


# Swift Justice

Marcus Swift '14 transforms hard experience into legal passion



Marcus Swift '14 arrived at RWU Law with a background as a political organizer and a passion for social justice. He knew what he wanted to do – work for change, on the side of the disadvantaged – but he wasn't precisely sure of how he was going to do it. Energized by the school's Feinstein Center for Pro Bono & Experiential Learning, however, with its extensive professional contacts and resources, he began to explore the varied field of public interest law, with an eye toward gaining as much hands-on experience in as many different areas as he possibly could.

Today, as he prepares to graduate, Swift is president of the student Association for Public Interest Law, and a board member of the Feinstein Center. Along with fellow law student Tracy Harper '13, he organized the 2013 Alternative Spring Break, which sent some 37 students to public interest legal projects around the country for a week of pro bono work in fields such as immigration, environmental law and criminal defense. Through internships, externships, clinics

organized by the school's Pro Bono Collaborative, in-house legal clinics and more, Swift has also racked up practical, skill-building experience in a striking variety of public interest fields, including employment law, criminal defense, immigration, and legal issues associated with domestic violence, homelessness and more.

For example, through a Pro Bono Collaborative clinic that worked with noted local immigration attorney Hans Bremer '08 and the Olneyville Neighborhood Association, Swift got invaluable experience in assisting undocumented immigrants who could benefit from the new Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

"That experience was incredible," he says. "It gave me practical immigration experience, and led me to apply for the Immigration Clinic. The result has been that I've had the privilege of working with two of the top immigration lawyers in the state: Deborah Gonzalez '07 [then interim director of the Immigration Clinic] and Hans Bremer. Those are incredible opportunities and that

level of access is, I think, unique to RWU."

Swift comes to his passion for public interest lawyering through highly personal experience. After his parents divorced, his mother worked her way through a series of low-wage jobs. When Marcus was 12, the two were evicted from their trailer home, and spent the summer before 7th grade homeless, living in a pop-up tent camper with his mother's boyfriend and struggling to keep their heads above water.

"That certainly doesn't define me, but it's always been the thing that pushes me," he says. "A lot of people who are drawn to this work are pushed by similar experiences. Whether it's race or gender or income – they may not have had the cookie-cutter experience of the perfect family; the march through college and right to law school. They often have had some kind of experience that sets them apart, that gives them a little different perspective."

Swift's broader perspective has been a great match for a school that has embedded a focus on public interest law in its mission.

"We're one of only 24 law schools in the country that have a mandatory pro bono requirement," says Laurie Barron, director of the Feinstein Center. "And unlike many institutions, we put resources behind that focus – we offer public interest scholarships, public interest summer stipends for students to gain experience in unpaid internships, and a public interest loan repayment program," so students can take those lower-paying public interest jobs with less financial pressure.

It's the kind of support that has allowed someone like Swift to flourish. "Marcus has been a quiet leader in this area," Barron says. "He comes by his passion honestly, he can relate to his clients – there's no doubt that Marcus will work for the underrepresented when he leaves here."

– Lesley Riva