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LIVING

Lewis & Clark is epicenter for animal law



Gieri Bolliger, who practices animal law in Switzerland, came to Lewis & Clark to "see how it works here," and get a master's in animal law.

Gieri Bolliger has been practicing animal law for 20 years in Zurich but he came to Portland to gain some international perspective.

Bolliger, 45, directs an animal welfare organization called the Foundation for the Animal in the Law (similar to our Animal Legal Defense Fund).

He's in Portland pursuing his master's degree in animal law, the first international student to do so at Lewis & Clark Law School, the only law school in the world that offers an advanced legal degree in the field.

"For me, this is really useful to have new input to see how it works here," he says, "because the problems are the same, but there are other ways to approach these problems."

Animal cruelty and animal welfare issues at factory farms are big problems in Europe just as



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PET TALK

they are here.

Learning how Americans deal with them can help Bolliger at his job in Switzerland, just as he hopes his insight on European animal welfare standards may influence his classmates stateside.

The program is housed within Lewis & Clark's Center for Animal Law Studies in collaboration with the Animal Legal Defense Fund.

The program celebrates its first full year this month and officially opened to international students this fall.

Traditionally, U.S. law school master of laws programs offer attorneys from other countries the opportunity to study the American legal system and culture, says Natasha Dolezal, director of the Animal Law LL.M. Program at Lewis & Clark.

Please see **ANIMAL LAW**, Page C3

Animal law

Continued from Page C1

Because animal law is one of the fastest-growing areas of law both nationally and worldwide, it made sense to open the program to people from other countries.

"As the field develops and grows, we recognize the importance of understanding animal law at the global level," Dolezal says. "We want to help our students develop the skills to speak and cooperate on an international level."

There are 147 law schools in the U.S. and Canada that have offered at least one course in animal law, according to the Animal Legal Defense Fund. In 1998, only about eight law schools offered animal law classes.

The universities of Basel (Switzerland) and Barcelona now offer a doctoral and master's program, respectively, but no other school offers a specialized advanced law degree.

Many of the animal law master's students at Lewis & Clark have been out of law school anywhere from



Far from a turkey, the master's in animal law program is, Martha Claire Howe says, "a good way to expand what I was already interested in."

two to 20 years and are practicing in other areas of the field.

"They've been working for firms and practicing in

civil litigation or insurance defense, and they're not satisfied," Dolezal says.

They include students such as Sarah Cruse, a

former defense litigation attorney who practiced law for five years in Chicago before joining Lewis & Clark's inaugural class last fall.

Now, instead of focusing on insurance defense or medical malpractice suits, she'll apply her abilities to research, write and advocate for farm-animal welfare and wildlife issues.

"I had wanted to continue being an attorney but go into a different direction," says Cruse, 36. "This was a way to continue to use my skills as an attorney but also pursue my passion."

Cruse is currently doing an internship with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Washington, D.C.

She spoke while en route to New Jersey, where she'll join a campaign working to override Gov. Chris Christie's veto of a bill that would ban confinement of pregnant pigs in gestation crates.

Other students enter the master's program directly after earning their law degree, which is required to pursue an LL.M.

These students may have attended law schools that offered few or no animal law

courses.

With more than 30 courses focusing on animal law, Lewis & Clark's program boasts the most comprehensive animal law curriculum in the nation and the world, Dolezal says.

Courses include animals in entertainment, international wildlife law and crimes against animals. Other than a graduate seminar, the courses are the same as the ones offered to J.D. students who want to specialize in animal law and earn an Animal Law Certificate.

But while those students must also take classes that teach them the foundations of becoming a lawyer, the master's program allows them to focus largely on animal law; at least 18 of 26 total credits must be in that area.

The program at Lewis & Clark opened up just as Martha Claire Howe was finishing her law degree at Florida Coastal School of Law. She entered the program in September 2012 and plans to graduate in December.

"This was a good way to expand what I was already interested in," says Howe, 32.

Now she hopes to focus on humane education, which she describes as an area of educational reform encompassing human rights, environmental sustainability and animal welfare into a comprehensive school curriculum.

She'd like to work at a legislature or a humane education organization such as Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers.

Dolezal says the program can prepare students like Howe with the right background to pursue their passion and educate a new breed of attorneys who specialize in animal law.

"Our program didn't exist when they were law students and planning for their post-law school careers," she says. "They're now taking advantage of the opportunity to go back to school to earn this advanced degree and to use the LL.M. program as a bridge to cross into an area of law they are truly excited about."

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