



JUSTICE SONIA SOTOMAYOR,
United States Supreme Court

STUDENTS VISIT JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR

*SMU Law Students Enjoy Rare Opportunity for Q&A with
U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor*



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A visit to the Supreme Court of the United States to hear oral arguments is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The opportunity to have a question-and-answer session with a Supreme Court Justice is a life-long dream even for many of the best and brightest lawyers in America.

This past spring, a select group of students from SMU Dedman School of Law got to experience both.

Twenty 2L and 3L students traveled to Washington, D.C. in March to listen to oral arguments in two cases before the Supreme Court. Immediately following the arguments, the students had the extraordinary opportunity to meet Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

"Walking into the court was hands-down one of the most exciting and overwhelming experiences I have had in my life," said Class of 2013 SMU Dedman law student Sadat Montgomery, who was president of the Black Law Students Association and actually spearheaded the event.

While each of the twenty SMU Dedman law students came away with different impressions and were impacted in unique ways, all agreed that they were in awe from the moment they walked into the courtroom of the Supreme Court.

"The courtroom itself was breathtaking – the red velvet curtains, the massive gold clock hanging in the front, the marble statues and carvings, the vibrant colorful ceilings, the rows of seats similar to pews," said Erin C. Callahan, Class of 2011, who was president of the Student Bar Association and Women in Law. "I froze when I walked into the room. I never imagined



A group of female law students gather around a portrait of JUSTICE SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR at the Supreme Court.

I would have such a visceral response. I thought the courtroom would be similar to every other court, only with more judges. It is a memory I will never forget."

Jason Sansone, who was Student Bar Association Vice President and a member of the Class of 2011, said watching the Supreme Court in action was "mesmerizing."

"It was enjoyable to see the interactions of the Justices on the bench and how they asked questions with the intent of swaying their colleagues," said Sansone, who is now in-house counsel at National Credit Solutions.

But the star of the event, as far as the students are concerned, was Associate Justice Sotomayor, who is the first Hispanic Justice ever to serve on the Supreme Court. She generously led a question-and-answer session for the students in which she shared her insights and experiences as a Justice on our nation's highest court.

"It was humbling to hear Justice Sotomayor speak so eloquently about everything from the law to becoming a celebrity," says Punam Kaji, who is in the Class of 2012. "She came into the room and there was a nice chair set up for her front and center. She told us that if she sat in the chair, we would not be able to see her that well. So, she sat on top of the table that was behind

her, feet dangling. The moment she walked in, she was down to earth and approachable, yet full of dignity. "

Monica Adriano, Class of 2011, and president of the Hispanic Law Students Association, said Justice Sotomayor's comments had real meaning for her.

"What impacted me the most was realizing that Justice Sotomayor shares the same concerns that I do regarding the need to improve the educational system," said Adriano. "Her passion and concern about the educational system mirror my own perspectives on the issue. She has inspired me to continue to meet my goals in improving the American educational system."

Callahan asked Justice Sotomayor, who was the third woman to serve on the Supreme Court, if she had any advice for female law students who are about to graduate.

"Her response," says Callahan, "was simple yet impactful: 'Don't become bogged down in the fear of making the right choice; follow your instincts and know there is no wrong choice. Don't let fear immobilize you.'"

SMU Dedman School of Law and two other law schools – American University Washington College of Law and Harvard Law School – were the three institutions to be invited to participate in this very special event. ■