

# Sharod McClendon

## CHANGING COMMUNITIES FROM WITHIN

Atlanta-native Sharod J. McClendon's first experience with the law came when he observed his uncle's court proceedings at the age of 10. Seeing his mother despair over not being able to afford an attorney for her brother, McClendon became determined that he was going to be a lawyer and help his community.

McClendon graduated from Atlanta's B.E.S.T. Academy, a single-gender high school, where he was valedictorian. While at the academy, he was introduced to School of Law 2004 alumnus Kevin A. Gooch who mentored him and helped him secure an internship at Alston & Bird after high school.

"Kevin showed me so much of what I can achieve. I had never seen a black lawyer before," McClendon said. "He just made something that was so much a dream into a reality for me."

After starting law school in the fall of 2018, McClendon said he felt out of place at times, but he made it a point to talk to his classmates and find commonalities.

"It's been great. It's been very hard. It's been very rigorous, but I tell people I have never felt more like I was in the right place ever before," he said. "For the first time I'm enjoying what I'm learning. It's challenging me. I see what I'm learning. I see how I can apply it to make a career."

McClendon is currently a Benham Scholar and as such is part of a program seeking to enhance diversity in the legal profession. Last fall, McClendon and his fellow scholars enjoyed meeting Georgia Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham (J.D.'70), the program's namesake.

McClendon was pleased that his first-year course load included criminal law, property law and constitutional law.

"These courses have shown me that the work that I want to do will help people," he said. "I want to be able to see the work I'm doing actually benefiting everyday people."

As a first-generation college and law student, McClendon also wants to build a community for fellow first-generation law and college students at UGA.

Along with rising third-year student Tyler C. Mathis, the duo created the First-Generation Student Association to foster a community within the law school where students can share experiences, get advice from graduates and tips on job searching.

Thus far, his wisdom to first-generation students – and others – is tri-fold:

"First, be proud of yourself. [Law school] is an accomplishment within itself. You're changing your family's trajectory. Always be an advocate for yourself. ... You know what's best for you."

He added that you should "never be afraid to ask people for help or to tell them what you need for you to do better."

Most of all he said you should "take advantage of all opportunities being presented to you, even if that seems scary. Change is scary, but there's a lot of good that comes from change. ... Be open to growth and then just work your hardest."



# Elizabeth Wilmot

## FOLLOWING THE FAMILY PATH

Rising third-year law student Elizabeth M. Wilmot knew she wanted to become a lawyer ever since she saw her father practicing law in South Georgia. The third in her family to attend law school – after her father and brother – Wilmot also knew she wanted to study at the UGA School of Law after completing her undergraduate degree in Athens with a 4.0 GPA, despite fielding offers from other law schools.

Wilmot said the School of Law was her first choice, and though she applied to other schools, Athens was "where my heart was."

Her older brother, Matthew C. Wilmot (J.D.'14) is a Double Dawg and has consistently offered her guidance. "UGA Law afforded him with so many great opportunities, and he continues to have close relationships with friends and professors from law school," she said. "I have often thought that was just what I wanted from a law school."

# Jacob Bohn

## ALWAYS SERVING

When Jacob R. “Jake” Bohn, a veteran and rising second-year law student, is feeling the pressure of law school he remembers that he completed the U.S. Army’s formidable Ranger School.

“One percent of people serve in the Army, and only one percent of those people graduate Ranger School. So that’s a cool statistic to know every once in a while when you’re feeling down,” he said.

After serving seven years in the military as a field artillery officer, Bohn came to the School of Law as a U.S. Military Academy at West Point alumnus, a collegiate football player, and a graduate of the Ranger, Airborne and Air Assault Schools with one tour in Afghanistan under his belt.

“I really enjoyed my time in the Army,” Bohn said. “I got the chance to work with a lot of inspirational and talented individuals.”

The Baltimore native said he was drawn to law school since he’s “always liked the idea of being an advocate for somebody.

“I’ve always liked the idea of standing up for the ‘little guy’ and standing up for somebody when they need representation, and service has always been important to me,” he said. “As a lawyer you are a servant. Throughout my professional experience, I’ve been trained to be a leader. I feel like the most powerful form of leadership is through service. So a lawyer is in a unique position to lead and serve.”

Bohn discovered that transitioning to law school was made easier by finding community in the Christian Legal Society, with fellow veteran law students and through his relationship with his mentor, Eric S. Abney, a rising third-year student. However, the most important support system for him has been his family, especially his wife, Jordan.

When possible, Bohn likes to attend events sponsored by various law school organizations from the Sports and Entertainment Law Society to the Federalist Society. He also serves the law school as a Dean’s

Ambassador, and Bohn said he feels grateful for the opportunity as it allows him to “give back to UGA, at least a little bit, as they have invested in me.”

When facing challenges in law school, Bohn thinks back to his military comrades who have died while serving our country. “There’s a sense of gratitude and a little bit of guilt because that could have been me,” he said. This mindset motivates Bohn to take on adversity and to do his best for those who will not have such chances.

In the most difficult times, Bohn said he tells himself: “I’ve seen hard things and I’ll get through it.”

This past summer, Bohn worked at Ausley McMullen in Tallahassee, Florida, before interning at the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Georgia in Savannah. He wanted to gain criminal and civil law experience by assisting the Department of Justice on federal cases.

In the future, Bohn wants to do his part in helping veterans studying the law because he understands the difficulty in returning to school after military service.

“Hopefully, in the future I’m mentoring the next group of lawyers,” he said. “It would be great to help some law students who are in a similar position as me.”



—All profiles by Mauli Desai

Wilmot is a Russell Distinguished Law Fellow at UGA. This fellowship, underwritten by the Richard B. Russell Foundation, supports a student from rural Georgia who is pursuing a career in public service, similar to the scholarship’s namesake, the late U.S. Sen. Richard B. Russell (LL.B.’18).

As a Distinguished Law Fellow, Wilmot enjoys a full-tuition-plus scholarship which has afforded her experiences such as lunch with U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas last fall and professional development opportunities like visiting U.S. District Court Judge Valerie E. Caproni (J.D.’79) of the Southern District of New York. She also returned to New York this summer to shadow Caproni for a week and got “to work with the federal judge and gain insight into what it would be like to clerk for a judge in the future.”

The Tifton-native was in awe of her meeting with Thomas. “I never even imagined I would have the opportunity to sit and meet with a Supreme Court justice, especially in such a casual and colloquial way,” she said. “Throughout law school, we study a lot of Supreme

Court cases, so it was really interesting to get to meet someone who is taking part in making these major decisions that shape our legal system.”

Wilmot’s interest in litigation and healthcare practices secured her a summer associate position at Morris, Manning & Martin in Atlanta, where she was drawn to the friendly atmosphere of the law firm.

Additionally, Wilmot is a symposium editor for the *Georgia Law Review* and submitted a note with the assistance of Brumby Distinguished Professor in First Amendment Law Sonja R. West, one of her favorite professors, on the unconstitutionality of Georgia’s Panhandling Law.

In the future Wilmot said she can see herself working in Atlanta or Tifton, but importantly she seeks to always maintain a link to the law school community.

“I hope in five to 10 years that I am happy with where my law career has taken me, and that I still have a relationship with the law school,” she said.