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John Marshall law school

For the last decade, a professor and a student group have educated others about animal law

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Every spring, John Marshall Law School professor Susann M. MacLachlan begins her animal law class with a simple student directive.

Drop this course.

If you ever want to eat a Big Mac again, she tells them — or really, any meat — do yourself a favor and get out now.

Nobody does.

It's is a course, MacLachlan said, that can be "very depressing."

"There's the criminal law aspect — animal torture, animal hoarding — or factory farming and the conditions of the animals," she said. "Animals used for research. Animals used for clothing. Nothing is pleasant in this course."

For the past nine years, MacLachlan's passion for the material has superceded any unpleasantness students might get from her class.

It's an elective that's part of the school's general curriculum and complements the school's Student Animal Legal Defense Fund chapter (SALDF), formerly the Animal Law Society.

The chapter — which celebrated its 10-year anniversary Wednesday — is part of the Animal Legal Defense Fund, a national organization that advocates for animals.

John Marshall's animal law program is comprised of the student organization, MacLachlan's course and the school's animal law trial teams, which MacLachlan coached to first-place finishes in an annual animal law advocacy competition at Harvard Law School in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011.

The team also bagged a first-place finish at this year's legislative drafting and lobbying competition

ON THE DOCKET

The Student Animal Legal Defense Fund is co-hosting a free screening of "Cowspiracy," a documentary about the environmental impact of the beef industry. The movie runs from noon to 2 p.m. Oct. 21 at The John Marshall Law School. RSVP at eventbrite.com/e/cowspiracy-screening-at-the-john-marshall-law-school-tickets-13047450275.

at Northwestern University School of Law.

"It's not (just) the horrible animal cruelty aspect," MacLachlan said. "There are some fun things the group does. Every year in the spring we have what we call a 'pro bone-o' contest," in which people submit pet photos that others vote on.

Votes cost \$1. The group then donates the money to an animal rescue or a nonprofit helping animals. The effort usually raises \$1,000 or more.

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More important than the competitions — whether trial advocacy or photo contests — are the program's educational benefits.

Sarah Hanneken, the chapter's current president, chose John Marshall ahead of "what is considered the best animal law program in the country," Lewis & Clark Law School in Oregon.



Susann MacLachlan

"I knew that going to John Marshall over Lewis & Clark was going to be a perfectly fine decision, despite Lewis & Clark's national reputation for its animal law program," said Hanneken, who picked John Marshall due to its proximity to her hometown of Milwaukee and its scholarship offer.

At John Marshall, Hanneken pushed the Animal Law Society to embrace the SALDF name. The group helps educate Chicagoans about factory farming, gestation crates, battery cages and so-called "Ag-Gag" laws.

"Essentially what these laws do is make it illegal to film any aspect of an animal agricultural operation," said Hanneken, who is in her second of four years.

The group also hosts "pay-per-view" events at the law school, a booth with a four-minute video about factory farming. Students

proached McFadden at the panel to express her shock that such practices still occurred in the U.S.

"She came to learn about why that was the case and what she could do to make a difference," said McFadden, a third-year student.

One thing Hanneken suggests concerned individuals do is go beyond reading food labels and actually visit farms that produce food.

People trying to live an animal-friendly lifestyle by purchasing "cage free" eggs, for instance, will have unpleasant revelations.

"It's not as idyllic as 'cage free' makes it sound," Hanneken said. "These animals are still crammed into about the same amount of space. They just don't have cages around them. They still can't move at all because of the sheer number of hens."

The organization encourages membership among all types of people — including those who eat more than vegetables.

"Even meat-eaters have so many valuable things to offer, in the way of ideas and support — and are just all-around awesome people," Hanneken said.

Following graduation, Hanneken wants to go into lobbying, while McFadden is interested in environmental law — a close cousin of animal law.

"It is absolutely wonderful to be at a school that has had an SALDF chapter for so long," Hanneken said. "It definitely reinforces my satisfaction with my choice in law school."

MacLachlan hears similar feedback from other graduates.

Last month, she received a letter from a graduate who called the class "one of the best I took at JMLS."

"My soon-to-be brother-in-law was going to propose following a horse-drawn carriage ride around the city," he wrote. "I talked him out of it and showed him videos of the cruelty horses endure. I owe my new perspective and outlook to you."

"So it does stick with people," said MacLachlan, known to colleagues and friends as Sunny.

Though no student has, to her knowledge, become a vegetarian due to the program, she did have one student who got close.

"I was a vegetarian for every day of that course," he told her.

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