

Dear Texas Appleseed Guests –

Junior year in college was a real turning point for me.

I had finally adjusted to going to school full time while working. My grades improved throughout school, but I still had no idea what to do once I graduated.

My mother was the first and only of her seven brothers and sisters to go to college, and my brother had been the first of the grandchildren. So this was still relatively uncharted territory for us. I can remember, over five years later, the first time I saw the flyer for the Texas Appleseed/Kaplan Diversity Scholars. I had read in the Daily Texan about the Hopwood controversy that was brewing, but it had not resonated with me, because I felt so detached from the law school. But looking at that flyer in front of the student union gave me pause. Someone in the community cared about what was happening to diversity at the next level of education, and wanted to help do something about it. Until that point I had been stuck in the present, worrying about my papers that were due, and the hours I'd have to work that week. The opportunity offered by the Diversity Scholar program made me think about my plans for the future. More importantly, it made the idea of going to law school seem less foreign, and more accessible.

The act of winning the scholarship also did a great deal for my self esteem and was positive reinforcement for the work I had performed up until that point. When I took the Kaplan course, I threw myself into it, determined to get the most out of this valuable opportunity. My commitment to the Kaplan program paid off and I scored in the 97th percentile of all LSAT takers.

Because of my strong scores and my work experience, I was presented with numerous options for law school. I chose to attend Duke University School of Law, where I was Managing Editor of the Duke Journal for Comparative and International Law and graduated with Honors.

My experience with Texas Appleseed did not end after I left for law school. During my 1L summer I had the chance to come back to Austin and help with the ambitious Indigent Defense/Equal Justice Project which Texas Appleseed was spearheading. My exposure that summer to attorneys, judges, and court officials provided me with invaluable experience and reminded me how precious our legal rights are.

That summer also inspired me to want to continue working within the justice system, and after I graduated I clerked for the Honorable George P. Kazen, Chief Judge of the Southern District of Texas. The highlight of my (short) legal career was when Judge Kazen sat on the Fifth Circuit last May and I was present for arguments in a criminal case that I briefed for the Appellate Panel.

I am now an associate at Arnold and Porter in Washington D.C., which is recognized as one of the top firms for pro bono work in the country. I look forward to giving back to the community through service in the law. In many ways the work that I perform is a tribute to those who helped me get where I am. This includes the Kaplan and Appleseed programs for their vision and willingness to act when they see need.

Sincerely,  
Forrest Deegan J.D., Scholar 1998  
Duke University Law School, 2002