

# Ten Students Participate in the Law School's Unique UN CAT Project for Third Consecutive Year

Since 2004, the [United Nations Committee against Torture \(UN CAT\) Project](#) has been giving American University Washington College of Law students the opportunity to experience firsthand the UN CAT proceedings in Geneva, Switzerland.

With the generous support of the Kovler Foundation, the number of students participating in the UN CAT Project was expanded from six to ten for the third consecutive year. *(Photo: Student participants and Professor Cynthia Jones)*

Participants joined Dean Grossman in Geneva this November, where in his capacity as chair of UN CAT, he is presiding over the Committee's 47th session. He is also serving as rapporteur for Germany and co-rapporteur for Djibouti and Morocco. In Geneva, students witnessed the dialogue between the Committee and State Party delegations, identified relevant developments and issues, and met regularly to strategize and conduct follow-up research.



“Participating in the UN CAT Project has been an amazing experience in academic, professional, and personal terms,” said Charles Abbot, a 3L participant. “The experience has also been uniquely complementary to my work in national and regional human rights work.”

This year’s Project participants included: Charles Abbott III, Tracey Begley, Douglas Keillor, Kate Kelly, Andrew Maki, Courtney Moran, Shubra Ohri, Federico Barillas Schwank, Mina Trudeau, and Ann Capps Webb. The group was also joined in Geneva by Professors Cynthia Jones and Robert Dinerstein, and UN CAT Project Coordinator, Jennifer de Laurentiis.



According to de Laurentiis, observing the official dialogue between the Committee and States parties is an important component of the Project.

“While in Geneva, the students expand their knowledge of the legal prohibition against torture by developing a deeper understanding of the treaty body and its proceedings,” she said.

"This experience underscores the importance of thinking strategically and helps them to become more effective lawyers."

The Project's participants are selected during the spring semester. The following fall semester, students assist in preparing for the official UN CAT meetings and partake in a specialized seminar on the prohibition of torture under international law, taught by Dean Claudio Grossman and Jennifer de Laurentiis. The seminar involves delving into material concerning torture and human rights in pertinent countries, and drafting papers identifying potential compliance issues involving the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

"It is very unique and rewarding to see your research and writing being used in such an immediate and concrete way," said Kate Kelly, a 4L. "As a law student we rarely get the satisfaction of seeing all of those hours in the library being utilized to concretely affect such a serious and weighty proceeding."

"Participating in the UNCAT project has really opened my eyes to the inner-workings of the United Nations treaty bodies and the role that they play in the international system.... Beyond experiential learning, the UNCAT project allows students to expand their professional network far and wide," added Federico Barillas, also a participant.

Upon the group's return to the law school, students continue to participate in initiatives and scholarship to raise awareness on campus and in the broader community about eradicating torture worldwide. As part of a panel at the law school on Feb. 7, 2012, Dean Grossman, UN CAT Project Coordinator Jennifer de Laurentiis, student participants, and professors will discuss the 2011 Project, as well as the application process and deadline for the 2012 Project.



"It has been an honor to contribute in this small way to the cause of elimination of torture," Kate Kelly said.

Inquiries about the UN CAT Project should be directed to [Jennifer de Laurentiis](#).