The last time Tate J. Kunkle (JD ’06, LLM ’09) was in Erie County Court in Buffalo, NY, he defended a DUI speed boater who had run over a kayaker. There were exhibits. Cross-examinations. Nervous witnesses. And there was the rush of excitement, a feeling he was shifting justice into gear. But the boating accident case had been legal sport. Kunkle then was a Pace Law School student arguing in a mock trial. His next case was real. “Courtroom work is serious, when you have people who sink all their savings into a retirement house, only to have their water get contaminated causing them to get sick, and they have no one to turn to,” says Kunkle, who is now an associate attorney with the firm Napoli Bern Ripka Shkolnik, L.L.P. “It’s up to me and the people working for me to get them some relief money so they can put their lives back on track and enjoy retirement instead of hauling bottled water up and down the stairs.” His Pace Law experience had prepared Kunkle for what to expect. Now, the courthouse seemed as comfortable as a well-tailored suit, boosting his confidence, an essential element in effective advocacy. Kunkle’s sense of déjà vu reflects a triumph borne out of Pace Law’s focus on teaching the substantive law, developing new skills, and then helping students sharpen them in simulations, mock trials, moot competitions and clinics. The result: an immersion that creates a corps of law graduates who are not just practice-ready but experienced by the time they earn their degree. As a law student, Kunkle had represented Pace in Advanced Trial Advocacy competitions and interned in the Pace Energy and Climate Center. As a practicing attorney, he works on the cutting-edge of environmental law including plaintiffs’ mass tort litigation for oil spills and
hydraulic fracturing (fracking) contamination. Skills he developed at Pace contributed to winning a $712.5 million settlement for 10,000 rescue and recovery workers suffering from injuries sustained while sifting through the toxic mountain of debris after 9/11, one of the largest related to the World Trade Center disaster.

“It’s gratifying to be able to use my legal skills to help people,” Kunkle says. “Pace fully prepared me for the real world.”

Pace Law School is committed to transforming students into effective practitioners who possess the legal knowledge, skills and experience necessary to make an immediate impact in their chosen field of law. This commitment, coupled with a passion for helping people and for making the world a better place, gives graduates an edge in a legal job market considered the toughest in decades.

“Practice-readiness has always been central to Pace Law School’s mission and to the school’s experiential approach. “Practice-readiness has been our focus for 25 years, and we have continued to evolve it and stay ahead of the curve,” says Professor Jill I. Gross, Director of Legal Skills. “We have a clinical pedagogy that we strive to implement in every one of our skills classes. Most of our faculty, even if they don’t teach in the skills program, completely support it and understand its importance. There’s a unique devotion to experiential teaching that transcends the entire faculty. That’s pretty unique.”

Preparing for practice from Day One

Pace Law School’s first-year program emphasizes fundamental lawyering skills including client interviewing and counseling as well as traditional research, writing and analysis, giving students a sense of what they’ll be doing as lawyers. Later, the curriculum engages upper level students, building on these experiences through simulation courses, including negotiation, mediation and arbitration. They can also polish their new skills by participating in a rich array of clinics, interning at centers, or clerking in an externship. “Pace values skills training so much, we have a requirement to take upper level skills classes, whereas most schools do not,” says Gross.

Powerful simulation courses

“The simulations courses are a great way to test out one’s lawyering skills in a safe environment,” says Professor Lou Fasulo (JD ’83), Director of Advocacy Programs and a partner in the law firm of Fasulo, Braverman and DiMaggio. “In Trial Advocacy, students learn the pros and cons, and dos and don’ts of trials and of arguing cases. They draft a plan, execute an opening statement that is videotaped in a state-of-the-art simulated courtroom, and then the class will critique a student’s performance.”

Litigators need excellent trial skills, but not all cases end at the trial court level which is why Fasulo also provides training for future appellate lawyers. To earn a place in the Advanced Appellate Advocacy class, students must excel in the first-year moot court competition.

Students also gain experience through trial teams and moot court competition programs. This past school year, Pace took top honors at the Tulane University Law School National Baseball Arbitration Competition, beating teams from 40 prestigious law schools. A member of the Pace National Moot Court team took second place for best brief, and for the second year in a row, the Pace International Criminal Court team competed in the finals at The Hague. Pace Law placed first in the St. John’s Securities Dispute Resolution Triathlon Competition, won best team in the Gray’s Inn
Moot Court Competition, and advanced to the top 16 (out of 285 teams) in the Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot Court Competition.

Moot court and simulation experiences can help mold a future lawyer. “You don’t do it from your bedroom. You don’t do it from a library with a computer. You have to stand in a moot courtroom or in a large classroom and you have to address a group of people and deal with whatever the situation is both intellectually and verbally,” says James Healy (JD ’12), who was awarded “Best Oralist” in the National Moot Court Team regional finals 2010-11.

Real-world skill building

Along with the experience of competition lies real-world legal experience secured via the Pace Environmental Litigation Clinic as well as Pace’s John Jay Legal Services which includes the Barbara C. Salken Criminal Justice Clinic, the Equal Justice America Disability Rights Clinic, the Immigration Justice Clinic, and the Investor Rights Clinic. The clinics operate under a student practice order permitting students to practice on behalf of clients. The school’s clinical programs are exceptionally strong, offering unparalleled hands-on experience that puts students on the path to becoming excellent lawyers.

On any given day, students are representing actual clients in immigration hearings, appealing the denial of social security benefits, representing victims of domestic violence, drafting special guardianship documents for the disabled or counseling investors who have lost their nest egg. Pace Law’s teacher-mentors ensure that students are learning what they need to do in order to represent clients properly.

“While there are a number of classes that I enjoyed, I’d have to say the most valuable aspect of my legal education was the time spent in the actual field,” says Erik Harris, (JD ’13). “Competitors like me crave the real thing.”

Harris defended public employees on behalf of the City of Mount Vernon. Eventually he wants to work in the sports industry, a world that is familiar to him. “And when I do, I know
“What makes our clinics special is we’re very serious about the students taking full responsibility for the cases.”

—Margaret Flint, Executive Director of John Jay Legal Services

that my legal education will be an invaluable part of what will make me a dynamic professional,” he says.

Pace Law’s clinical focus enables students to gain both in-depth exposure to cases and assume the burden of responsibility. “Clinical education has been around for 40 years, but the value of it is more appreciated now,” says Margaret M. Flint, Executive Director of John Jay Legal Services, adding, “What makes our clinics special is we’re very serious about the students taking full responsibility for the cases.”

Harmon echoes the thought. “Our Environmental Litigation Clinic puts students in the driver’s seat in their cases instead of just doing legal research for the managing and directing attorney,” she says. “These students are responsible for cases from their inception; they’re thinking thoroughly about case theory; they’re doing the research. They’re acting as practicing attorneys out in the real world. And it is the real world.” About 10 students per semester go through the Environmental Litigation Clinic. It’s extremely rigorous, and they sometimes argue their cases before judges with the support of Professors Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Karl Coplan, clinic co-directors, and Adjunct Professor Daniel Estrin.

At the leading edge of policy and research

Students gain valuable practical experience as interns in the Pace Energy and Climate Center, where they learn to transform ideas into action. The Center brings together lawyers, economists, scientists and energy analysts to conduct research and analysis on legal, regulatory and policy matters in five areas: climate, community energy, energy efficiency, fuels and transportation, and renewable energy. Many students volunteer for research work, gaining academic credit. “Students aren’t just learning how to write white papers,” says Franz Litz, executive director of the Pace Energy and Climate Center. “They’re actually helping policy-makers effect change.”

The same is true for the Land Use Law Center where ten to twelve law students work each semester. Five of the six staff attorneys at the Center are professors as well as practitioners. “Our Center thrives because it integrates classroom learning, legal practice, and the work of other professionals, particularly environmentalists and real estate developers and their attorneys,” says Professor John Nolon, counsel to the Center. “We move with events in society, just like lawyers in practice, adjusting to new legal challenges and preparing students to embrace change and thrive in a fast-moving world.”

Making a difference globally

Pace has the premier international and comparative environmental law program in the country. The school offers opportunities for students to carve out their own niche while making an impact on society. As a Pace Law student, Elaine Hsiao (JD ’09, LLM ’10) spent a summer in Costa Rica outlining the legal framework for a peace park in a post-conflict region, the mountain forest between Honduras and Nicaragua. She then drafted a resolution for the peace park that was eventually adopted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) 4th World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain, which she attended as a student delegate of the Pace Center for Environmental Legal Studies. A coup in Honduras sidelined the park, but she proposed alternative approaches to peace parks as the basis of her LLM thesis at Pace. Hsiao won a Fulbright Grant to study transboundary collaboration and community conservation in Uganda’s Central Albertine Rift.

Pace grad Romulo Silveira da Rocha Sampaio (LLM ’06, SJD ’09), Director for International Services for the Brazil-American Institute for Law and Environment (BAILE) is an expert in issues relating to climate change, carbon sequestration and biofuels. He has published in both Brazil and the United States on issues of international environmental law and co-authored an article with Professor David Cassuto that appeared in the winter, 2013 issue of the Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law and Policy called Hard, Soft & Uncertain: The Guarani Aquifer and the Challenges of Transboundary Groundwater. “My time at Pace was fundamental for me to develop not only my lawyering skills, but my academic credential and the expertise necessary for me to run an environmental policy center in one of Brazil’s top think tanks,” says Sampaio.

Positioning students to land jobs

With a legal job market that remains tight, students and recent alumni are taking three extra steps to give themselves a competitive advantage: network, network, and network. “The most valuable thing in terms of career advancement for me was really the relationships I made with professors,” says Healy “My last semester in law school, I got a part-time job with the assistance of Professor [Emily Gold] Waldman. I got my current job [at Sullivan & Brill] with the help of Professor Fasulo.”

The American Bar Association’s Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources spon-
sors networking events in which Pace Law students and practicing attorneys “speed-date” for three-minute intervals to gauge compatibility and interest and foster job interviews. The National Environmental Law Moot Court Competition, hosted by Pace for the last 25 years, the Grand Moot, and the first year competitions are among the many events at which students meet competition judges, many of whom are also alumni, and can be considered for job openings.

Pace Law’s Center for Career and Professional Development (CCPD) plays a large part in attracting more potential employers to campus, to give students and alumni the opportunity to network with employers and alumni, and to increase internship and employment opportunities for students. The Center saw upward improvement in the number of graduates employed nine months after graduation for the Class of 2012.

Every March for the past five years, the CCPD has brought dozens of law firms, nonprofits, companies and government agencies to Pace for its Annual Winter Career Fair. Hundreds of students attend with resumes in hand to speak with prospective employers. The Center also sponsors practice-specific panel discussions and programs on campus, inviting distinguished practitioners, including alumni.

The Public Interest Law Center (PILC) helps launch the careers of students and alumni passionate about this avenue of law. PILC provides one-on-one counseling for students. They offer informative programs, sponsor the Public Interest Jobs Fair and line up pro bono projects and internships. The Public Interest Law Student Organization (PILSO) runs an online fundraising auction each March to help defray living expenses for students working in unpaid summer internships. A highlight of the fall semester is the lunch at which students report on their summer public interest experiences.

“The synergy of all that we do ultimately provides experience and opportunities to our students,” says Nicole Moncayo, Director of Employer and External Relations, Strategic Professional Development Initiatives. “In addition, sports panels, intellectual property panels, and visits by judges are not just intended to advance scholarship or academics, but to expose students to professionals and vice versa.”

Both the CCPD and the Public Interest Law Center encourage participation in journals, moot court competitions, student and bar organizations, and other extracurricular activities. The CCPD also uses the job-posting website Symplicity to connect with alumni. Current Pace Law students are registered users along with 2,700 alumni.

“We are unique in our individualized outreach to students and employers,” says Elyse Moskowitz, a CCPD counselor and Adjunct Professor. “Each spring, we reach out to each student whether or not they have visited our office, to check in, see if they have a summer position, and offer career development assistance. We engage students in their first year and continue to do so until they are placed.”

At the end of the day, the end of a semester or the end of three years of law school, it will always be about the law. Valedictorian Matthew Auten (JD ’13) put it well in his address when he said, “Despite all the changes [in the legal profession], two things I think we all can agree on is that our legal system is truly the foundation upon which our society is built and that there remain huge legal issues and challenges that will be addressed, for better or worse, by lawyers from our generation.” He ended by reminding his classmates that “…by joining the legal profession, we are taking on the obligation to provide that help.”