



# LWI LIVES

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*LWI Lives* is a regular electronic publication of the “Faces of LWI” Committee, which explores and communicates the emerging identity of LWI and its members. We have in common the commitment to being the best legal writing professors that we can be. But we are multi-dimensional people with different strengths, interests, curiosities, and gifts. By profiling individuals in our community, we hope to expand and develop our understanding of who we are and what we aspire to be.

## Nicole Chong: Sitting at the Intersection of Legal Writing and Robotics



By Allison Ortlieb

One wouldn’t normally associate legal writing with robotics, but there’s a nexus between the two disparate fields in the person of Nicole Chong. Nicole, Associate Dean and Professor of Legal Writing at Penn State Law, stumbled into the

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## Sha-Shana Chrichton: Soft-Spoken Soldier for Social Justice



By Elizabeth Berenguer

In our legal writing community, we have long recognized the necessity of stress management and taking a holistic approach to wellness. At conferences, we frequently take

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## Rima Mullins: Lesson Learned



By Whitney Heard

Achieving independence and self-reliance by pursuing a profession was instilled in Rima Mullins by her parents. Rima’s parents were refugees who initially fled from their

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Nicole and Her Husband

intersection of these fields about two years ago, thanks to her 15-year-old son.

Nicole's son, David, is a member of a FIRST Tech Challenge competitive robotics team, Flex Force One, which is organized through the Centre County 4H program in Pennsylvania. While a substantial portion of the competition focuses on the technical aspects of how the robot was built and what its skills are, another portion of the competition requires teams to submit various reports and papers regarding the build. The competition also requires the team to do a presentation on their robot. Enter Nicole Chong.

Nicole started as a parent chaperone with the team, just one of her son's many activities. Before long, she discovered that the team could use her coaching in preparing their paperwork and presentations. These skills are not all that different from those needed for oral argument. Although Nicole may not know anything about robots, she does a think or two about oral arguments.

Nicole was born and raised in Pennsylvania, and through her education and work, she has lived in many of the state's regions. Nicole is from Johnstown, not far from State College, where she lives now. Nicole attended Grove City College, near Pittsburgh, for undergrad. She majored in business, but threw her family a curve ball when she announced that she was going to go to law school after college. Law school came as a surprise to her family because she was a "really shy kid" until about 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She became more outgoing in high school than she had been previously, but law school did not seem to fit with the Nicole her parents knew.

Nicole attended The Dickinson School of Law of the Pennsylvania State University, where she concentrated her studies on commercial law and some family law. Her first job out of law school was with a small, 12-attorney firm in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. There, her practice focused on commercial law and family law. After three years, she made the jump to big law, accepting a position with Klett Rooney Lieber & Schorling (now Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney) in Philadelphia. Her practice at Klett Rooney focused on large-scale commercial litigation and appellate practice. Nicole made the move to teaching shortly after the birth of her son.



Nicole describes herself as a bit of a homebody. She is an avid reader of fiction, especially action novels—think Tom Clancy, but she has no particular favorite writer. She prefers to jump around to many authors. She also prefers to check books out of *(Chong continued from page 2)*

the library to buying them. She now has a Kindle, though, and is excited about the possibilities with having such a portable library. When not reading or bike riding with her family, Nicole spends considerable time as many of us do: playing chauffeur to David.

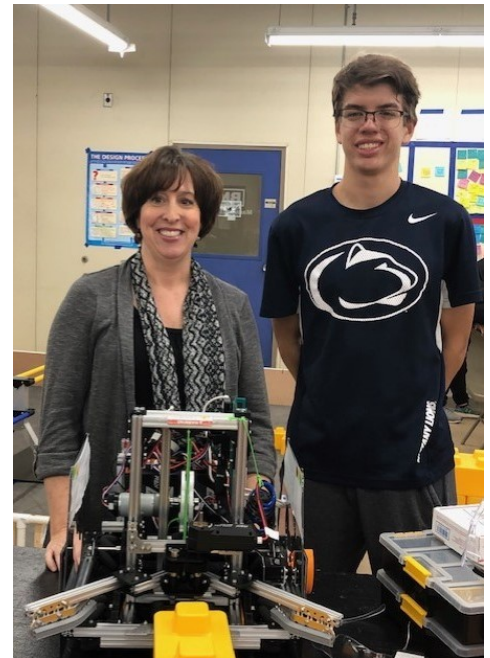
When David joined Flex Force One at the start of eighth grade, Nicole did not imagine it would grow into a family affair. The robotics season runs from September through February, unless your team is lucky enough to get a bid for the world championships, which takes place at the end of April in Detroit. Flex Force One competes in the division for students in grades 7-12, although the oldest kids on Flex Force One are in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Teams compete against other teams in the state in from December to February. Teams that are successful in these competitions can earn their way to compete at the state championships in early March. For teams successful at the state level, they can compete against teams from across the globe at the world championships.

In its inaugural year, Flex Force One received a wild card invitation to attend the world championships. The bid came as a bit of a surprise; the team thought its season was over and had begun disassembling their robot. But when they got the invitation to worlds, they rallied and put their robot back together. The team members and their families traveled to Detroit for the four-day STEM-fest and met teams from Asia to Europe. The Dutch team was a particular hit, as they handed out cheese to their fellow competitors. The Romanian team's giveaways were not quite as popular: while the parents appreciated the rum-flavored chocolates, the kids said "they taste weird." This year, Flex Force One has qualified to compete at the state championships in York, Pennsylvania in March – not bad for a team in their sophomore competition season. Of course, the team is hoping to make it back to this year's world championships.

In the off-season, Nicole and her family enjoy summer vacations, especially to the beach. Nicole grew up going to Ocean City, Maryland for summer beach vacations. Since meeting and marrying her husband, Nicole found a new favorite beach vacation: Curacao. In the years the family does not travel to Curacao for a summer adventure, they visit other beaches around the country from Florida to Washington state.

Nicole's summertime doesn't usually last very long; she teaches in the LL.M. summer orientation program two weeks prior to the start of the fall semester. Though the summer may be short, she is fortunate to return to a supportive dean and colleagues eager to share Instant Pot recipes.

If you would like to contact Nicole (and maybe share your own favorite well-seasoned Instant Pot recipes), you can reach her [atnrc10@psu.edu](mailto:atnrc10@psu.edu).



Nicole and David with Flex Force One Robot

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the lead to include programming to facilitate exercise, meditation, and healthy socializing. After all, all work and no play is no good for anyone. The 2019 conference hosted by ALWD is a great example of intentionally holistic programming. On the very first page of the program, there was an entire section entitled “Well-Being and Self-Care.” The program also called for break-out sessions where we came together in smaller groups to reflect on the conference program as well as other ideas prompted by our session leaders.

It was in one of these sessions that Sha-Shana shared an experience with us—it seemed familiar. Student submits a paper that makes very little sense. No structure, vague or missing rule statements, no analysis, confusing comparisons. In short, a hot mess. And like so many of us, Sha-Shana’s first thought was, what did I do wrong? Like a wise woman, she sought the advice of someone wiser—her mother. It was her mother who immediately noticed that the problems in the paper had nothing whatsoever to do with Sha-Shana; they were not a reflection of Sha-Shana’s teaching abilities at all. The problem was that the student was suffering from trauma, and the trauma was interfering with the student’s ability to write in a clear, cogent, and rational fashion.

This experience is only one of many that has influenced Sha-Shana as a legal writing professor and mentor to take a holistic approach to legal education. She also finds inspiration through books. Some that have shaped her teaching are [Crusader for Justice](#) by Damon Keith, [Mind, Brain, and Education: Neuroscience Implications for the Classroom](#), David Sousa ed., and [My Beloved World](#) by Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Recently, she has read [Think Black](#) by Clyde Ford, [Raising Mixed Race: Multiracial Asian Children in a Post-Racial World](#) by Sharon Chang, and the [Liturgy of the Ordinary](#) by Tish Harrison Warren. Interesting fact: Sha-Shana’s passion for books has facilitated her work as a literary agent.

Sha-Shana herself is a mindful person—she is quiet, reserved, and a good listener. But when she speaks, others listen. In her classroom, she checks in with her students every day to see how they are feeling. If the students are experiencing



Sha and Jeff at the Beach



Sha and Jeff at a Guinness Storehouse Tour

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distractions or stress from other areas of their lives, she works with them to deal with the stressors so they can turn to the task at hand. She does not coddle her students, though; on the contrary, she helps them to develop the skills to own their mistakes and identify their own areas of improvement. For example, instead of immediately indulging a student's request for feedback by pointing out any number of errors, she might encourage the student to read the work aloud to personally identify any mistakes. In this way, the student can take responsibility for the process of learning and maturing as a legal thinker and writer.

A lot of her advice teaches students how to plan effectively to reduce stressors that they can control or manage. In her experience, the failure to adequately plan creates a lot of unnecessary stress for students. Another source of stress is lack of feedback. We can all understand the dilemma of trying to give students substantial feedback that is "just right"—not so much that it overwhelms, but enough to guide them on how to improve. One of the ways she has addressed this issue is by supporting the development of the Writing Center and encouraging students to use the Writing Center as a resource for additional feedback. She also addresses stress by being a transparent professor and not hiding the ball from her students.

She recognizes, however, that there are other stressors that cannot be managed so easily. For example, as a professor at Howard, an Historically Black University, she experiences first-hand some of the unique stressors

that impact students of color and other marginalized groups: stressors caused by social and political issues, microaggressions, fear of rejection, and the mixed emotions that accompany stereotype threat. She addresses these stressors by incorporating social justice issues as a teaching tool in her classroom.

Sha-Shana recently wrote that "[i]ncorporating issues of social justice into the first-year legal writing course benefits all students by equipping them with the knowledge and practical skills to address issues of social injustice and to affect social change. Incorporating issues of social justice into the first-year legal writing course has the added benefit of contributing to a learning environment that permits law students of color and of historically marginalized groups to learn more successfully by reducing stress, altering their perception of control over psychosocial stressors, building positive emotions, increasing confidence, and motivating them to learn." To learn more about Sha-Shana's approach to managing stress through teaching social justice issues, check out her article: Sha-Shana Crichton, *Incorporating Social Justice into the 1L Legal Writing Course: A Tool for Empowering Students of Color and of Historically Marginalized Groups and Improving Learning*, 24 Mich. J. Race & L. 251 (2019).

When I asked Sha-Shana, "What do you want your legacy to be," she answered, "To be known as a good and fair person, patient and kind." Sha-Shana strikes the balance of goodness, fairness, patience, and kindness well. She understands that hard work must be balanced by play—the beach is one of her favorite playgrounds. She knows that her quiet demeanor must sometimes submit to vigorous cheering for her favorite football (soccer to the Americans) team, Arsenal. She is mindful in ways that honor the sacred, ordinary moments of life. Her legacy is undoubtedly a delicate harmony of goodness, fairness, patience, and kindness.

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*(Mullins continued from page 1)*

home countries to Jordan. They later met at the American University of Beirut where her mom was studying to become a nurse and her dad was studying to become a doctor. Her dad completed his medical residency in New York, where Rima was born. After leaving New York, they spent six months in London before heading to Libya. For three years, they waited in Libya for their Green Cards. In the early 1970s with Green Cards in hand, Rima's family returned to New York for a brief time before settling in



Rima and her husband Ed have been happily married for 28 years, and they are the very proud parents of four children.

Tampa. After settling in Tampa, Rima joked that she had a very normal childhood. Nonetheless, the lessons her family learned from their journey to America were not forgotten.

For Rima, her professional quest for independence and self-reliance initially meant studying to become a doctor. As a student at Brown University, she pursued pre-medicine courses and graduated with a degree in biology. As she got closer to graduation, she decided to follow a different path. This new path involved returning to her home state of Florida to take one year of accounting and business courses with the goal of becoming a licensed Certified Public Accountant. While on this new path to becoming a CPA, Rima's parents encouraged her to take the LSAT. Even though she had never considered going to law school



*(Mullins continued from page 6)*

or becoming a lawyer, Rima registered for the LSAT. When she received her results, Rima became convinced that she was meant to attend law school. And, she was right. Rima loved law school. She had found her profession at last!

Ultimately, Rima chose to attend the University of Florida College of Law because she knew after suffering through several New England winters while at Brown that her future was in sunny and sultry Florida. Plus, UF was only a couple of hours away from where she grew up in Tampa. While at UF, Rima reveled in the intellectual stimulation of learning the law. Law Review, in particular, was a meaningful experience for Rima. Not only did working on Law Review give her the opportunity to contribute to a prominent publication for legal audiences, she also met her future husband who happened to be the Law Review's Editor-in-Chief.

Without any lawyers in her family to advise her, Rima committed to a career in litigation based in large part on the accomplishments of television's superstar lawyer Perry Mason. Seeking exposure to a wide variety of practice areas, Rima interviewed with law firms in Miami. Eventually, she settled upon K&L Gates LLP because its small Miami office allowed her to work on big cases with complicated issues in federal court. After ten years at K&L Gates, Rima made a lateral move to another international law firm in Miami, White & Case LLP. Even though Rima enjoyed the challenge and fulfillment of litigating cases in federal court, she struggled to find balance as a working parent with four children to raise. With her youngest child in preschool and her oldest child in eighth grade, Rima left the law firm environment after sixteen years to serve as a career clerk for a federal magistrate judge. For the next ten years, Rima worked on civil and criminal matters in the Southern District of Florida while raising her four children.

Having worked for international law firms and the federal judiciary, Rima brings a unique perspective to her foundational classes as an Assistant Professor of Legal Skills and Values at Florida International University College of Law. Rima aims to teach from a practitioner's point of view and incorporates her successes and failures into her lessons. In addition to teaching students how to research, analyze, and write, Rima strives to teach them how much fun it is to take a side and win. She also emphasizes that law is a creative practice: lawyers create a piece of the law every time the judge enters an order or writes an opinion. So, through their research, analysis, and writing, lawyers contribute to the law's mosaic.

Rima supports her students outside the classroom, too. In addition to coaching a moot court team, Rima enjoys mentoring students as they explore different career paths and seek work-life balance. She strives to be the professor-mentor that she didn't have in law school, and she appreciates the opportunity to support her students in acquiring legal skills as well as life skills.

Rima's thriving professional life is complemented by her fulfilling personal life. She is happily married to her husband of 28 years, Ed, who is a partner at Reed Smith in Miami and specializes in international law. Together, Rima and Ed are the very proud parents of three daughters and one son. Even though her three daughters are scattered across the country now pursuing their professional passions, they are a close family that enjoys each other's company when they gather together. Rima attributes their closeness to her and Ed's frequent reminders during childhood that their relationships as children would determine their relationships as adults. No doubt, it is also a reflection of Rima's steadfast commitment to her family. As Rima reckoned, an employer had to accept her children for her to accept a job, especially in the days before remote working existed. It's hard for Rima to believe that in a few short months, she and Ed will be empty nesters with plans to travel more!

Rima has aimed to teach her four children those same lessons that her parents imparted about seeking a profession that bolsters independence and self-reliance. And, Rima's decades of success as a working parent are a ringing endorsement of embracing those lessons!

You can reach Rima at [rmullins@fiu.edu](mailto:rmullins@fiu.edu).

## UPCOMING LEGAL WRITING EVENTS

**20th Biennial Conference,  
Rhetoric Society of America**  
Portland, OR  
May 21-24, 2020

**Synergies & Scholarship Conf.**  
Univ of Oregon School of Law  
June 9-10, 2020

**Inst. Law Teaching & Learning  
Effective Instruction in Online  
and Hybrid Legal Education**  
Univ. of Arkansas  
June 11-13, 2020

**LWI Biennial Conference**  
Georgetown University  
July 15-18, 2020

**Lawyering Skills in the Doctrinal  
Classroom Conference**  
Univ. of North Dakota  
October 2-3, 2020

Check out these websites for more  
information on what's happening!

<http://www.lwionline.org/>  
<http://www.alwd.org/>  
<http://www.aals.org/aals-events/>



You, legal writing professors, are all  
planting a very lovely garden.

## LWI Lives Selection Process

The LWI Lives Committee is organized into three teams, and each team is responsible for selecting, proposing, and writing the three profiles in each issue. To ensure a diverse newsletter, teams propose individual names to the Co-Chairs, and the Co-Chairs review the suggestions to ensure a wide range of coverage over time.

If you have someone in mind who we should put on the list for a future newsletter, please feel free to email any of the committee members listed below. If you could include a note explaining why you think the individual's profile would be particularly interesting, it will help us in developing priorities.

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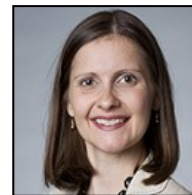
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