

# Meet the 2014 LMJ Scholars and the Future of the Legal Profession



**Jiali "Keli"  
Huang**  
MCCA Scholar  
Yeshiva University,  
School of Law

By **GLENN COOK**

JIALI "KELI" HUANG HAS DREAMED OF BEING an attorney since she moved to the United States with her parents at the age of eight. But her path to law school was fraught with family obligations and financial roadblocks that would have deterred all but the most determined individuals.

In 2010, Huang graduated cum laude from SUNY Binghamton with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, politics and law and minors in business,

Chinese and global studies. Law school, however, was four years away.

"When I first graduated, I was helping my parents start a business during the day and working at night as the overnight manager at Hollister," says Huang, the first in her family to attend college. "It would have been easy to start working and never go back to school, but I was adamant about staying on track. The work I will have the opportunity to do as a lawyer is very, very important. It's my dream."

Thanks to the LMJ Scholarship program, Huang has a financial head start to make that dream a reality. One of 15 recipients in the 2014 class, the 10<sup>th</sup> such group to receive the scholarships, Huang is completing her first year at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University.

The LMJ Scholarship grants \$10,000 to highly qualified but financially challenged students who are interested in pursuing a corporate law career. Almost 150 law students have received more than \$2.85 million since 2004. MCCA, at its sole discretion, can award additional money to recipients for their second and third years of law school.

"The scholarship will help the start of my legal career by providing me with more flexibility in choosing a career path," says Víctor Salcedo, another scholarship recipient who is a first-year student at Harvard



**Victor A. Salcedo**  
Nationwide Scholar  
Harvard Law School

Law School. “I will feel less pressured to make money and be more comfortable pursuing my desires to help people and diversify the legal field.”

### How the Legal Field Makes an Impact

Although their backgrounds and individual stories are different, most of the 2014 recipients are first- or second-generation Americans who witnessed their parents struggle to succeed. They see how the legal field, especially one that reflects the country’s increasingly diverse population, can make a difference.

“I saw how my parents struggled as immigrants, especially when they were working in the sweatshops,” says Huang, who grew up in Brooklyn. “No one



**Aldel ML. Brown**  
Microsoft Scholar  
Harvard Law School

around them knew what was going on, and they relied on me to advocate and be their translator. It really inspired me to be able to help them one day.”

Salcedo, whose parents were undocumented child immigrants from Mexico, grew up in a low-income community in California. In college, he worked in the courthouse in Compton and became involved with the UCLA Law Fellows and JusticeCorps. He says the “sense of some of the inequities and unfairness that plague communities like my own” is the reason he wants to pursue a law career.

“As a child, I thought the relationship between my community and the law was supposed to be adversarial,” he says. “I became interested in the legal field because I wanted to find out if the law could be used as a beneficial tool for low-income communities.”

Aldel Brown, the son of Jamaican immigrants, is at Harvard after graduating from Howard University in Washington, D.C. While a student at Howard, he co-founded the Shining Starts Montessori Academy Public Charter School and held jobs with the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Department of Justice.

“MCCA has given me the opportunity to have funding for an education, while gaining the endorsement to try something in the private sphere,” says Brown, who remains vice chairman of the charter school. “Those are my interests, finding a way to merge the public with the private and helping public and private entities remain legally sound and legally viable. I want to learn and develop and gain the tools necessary to bring a good marriage to the two sides.”

### Third-Grade Scrapbook Predicts Legal Future

Like Huang, Brown has been interested in the legal profession since he was a child. During a brief phone conversation between classes, Brown says he still holds

on to a third-grade scrapbook entry in which he wrote that he would be a lawyer someday. His parents, who moved to the Boston area from Jamaica in the early 1980s, instilled in him the values of hard work and determination.

“As a child of first-generation immigrants, I grew up with a strong sense of the importance of family reaching back and helping others,” Brown says. “I want to be a lawyer to help everyone and anyone understand the law and make it more tangible and practical.”

After helping her parents establish their laundromat, Huang spent more



**Delvin S. Turner**  
MCCA Scholar,  
University of California, Los Angeles, School of Law

than three years as a legal support analyst in the attorney general’s office in New York state. There, she says, her parents’ struggles and those of other low-income families again showed her the power she could have in being a lawyer.

“My parents are small business owners, and the 2008 economic crisis definitely hurt their business,” she says. “When I worked with the attorney general’s office, I had an opportunity to work on issues that dealt with the housing crisis, and I saw how much of an impact that the intersection of business and the law has. It deepened my interest in giving back.”



**Farzeen Tariq**  
Walmart Scholar  
Northwestern University, School of Law



**Frances R. Ha**  
MCCA Scholar  
Boston College, School of Law



**Taifha Baker**  
MCCA Scholar  
Georgetown University, School of Law



**Maybelline Mena-Hadyka**  
Microsoft Scholar  
New York University, School of Law



**Suman K. Momin**  
MCCA Scholar  
Duke University, School of Law

Delvin Turner grew up in a low-income, working class family in Pittsburgh’s Hill District. Unlike his fellow scholarship recipients, he is not a first- or second-generation immigrant, but the experiences of his family and those in his community shaped his decision to pursue the legal field.

“I knew I wanted to be an attorney the moment I studied Thurgood Marshall in elementary school and saw how the law could be used as a vehicle for change,” Turner says. “It seemed to me that studying law could empower me with the skills and knowledge necessary to not only overcome my childhood circumstances but also help others confront their problems.”

Turner worked his way through college and knew the cost of his education was “mine alone to shoulder.” He says the MCCA scholarship will alleviate most of the financial challenges he otherwise would have faced, ones he believe will ultimately affect his career path.

“The financial support will enable me to make career decisions based on how I can develop and grow professionally—as opposed to how I can pay back loans effectively—which is a key distinction that will help me become a better attorney,” he says.

### Tapping into the LMJ Network

One key aspect of the scholarship is the mentoring that each recipient receives from the LMJ sponsors, a group of 60 leading corporations and law firms, and other MCCA scholars. For most, that mentoring and opportunities for networking are just as valuable as the financial reward.

“The MCCA scholars are members of a small group of exceptional students,” says Taifha Natalee Baker, a first-year student at Georgetown University who is focusing on employment and insurance law. “I will be able to use that network to ... tap into a plethora of re-



**Pamela E.U. Nwaoko**  
Microsoft Scholar  
Harvard Law School



**Maya A. McKenzie**  
MCCA Scholar  
Georgetown University, School of Law



**Rachel Velasquez**  
PitneyBowes Scholar  
Vanderbilt University, School of Law



**Ke'Andra N. Levingston**  
Chevron Scholar  
Harvard Law School



**Sohayl Vafai**  
Robert Half Scholar  
University of California,  
Berkeley, School of Law



**Syeda N. Tasnim**  
MCCA Scholar  
New York University, School of Law

sources when I need help with a specific class or advice on my legal career.”

Huang says she has not had traditional mentors, just “anyone who I could talk to who would give me their perspective.” But she found one during interviews for the scholarship: MCCA Board Member Jean Lee, vice president and assistant general counsel for JPMorgan Chase.

“I’ve found mentors in the most unexpected ways,” Huang says. “In the case with Jean, we have similar experiences. She also immigrated when she was eight. Her family operated a small business. She saw the difficulties her parents had in operating a business and all of the legal issues that arise when you don’t have an advocate. So we share a lot of common ground, and that has been helpful as I’ve started law school.”

Huang looks back on the experiences that have shaped her to this point and says they will help her become a better lawyer in the long run.

“My parents are proud, but only to a certain extent, because they aren’t educated and don’t exactly understand what this means to me,” she says. “At first, they weren’t exactly supportive because they thought it would take me away from the family. They didn’t seem to understand that this will help them in the long run.”

Today, she’s happy that she didn’t give up on her childhood dream, despite what she describes as a “really challenging” class load.

“I can see that my stamina isn’t the same as it was when I was in college the first time,” she says. “But my appreciation is probably deeper. I’m grateful that I’m finally in law school, pursuing the dream I always wanted, and I know I’m fortunate that MCCA gave me that chance.” ■

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