



ALUM FEATURE & INTERVIEW: VIRGINIA HILL

Tell about yourself: What got you interested in LPS?

My interest in LPS developed when I began to notice the disconnect between written laws and their application in society. The Florida v. George Zimmerman trial, particularly the societal debate surrounding Stand Your Ground laws, captured my attention and I became intrigued by the relationship between legislation, criminal justice, and personal biases. The sense of injustice I felt after the not-guilty verdict fueled my passion for social justice and intensified my desire to pursue a degree that could make a meaningful impact.

What have you been doing since graduating from Drake?

After Drake, I pursued a master's degree in Political Science at the University of Nebraska (UNL), focusing on racial disparities in wealth, income, incarceration, and education. During my final year at UNL, I began working at the Nebraska Legislature as a Policy Researcher for State Senator Tony Vargas. In that position I collaborated with the Ombudsman to conduct research on restrictive housing (solitary confinement) and due process for incarcerated individuals sentenced to solitary. At the time, Nebraska was grappling with some of the nation's highest rates of prison overcrowding.

I then had the privilege of working with Senator Ernie Chambers, a longtime civil rights activist and Nebraska's longest-serving state senator. Under his mentorship, I gained valuable insights into advocating for marginalized communities, embodying his philosophy of empowering "the least, the last, and the lost." My research contributed to the passage of his priority bill LB 924, mandating implicit bias and anti-bias training for law enforcement agencies in Nebraska.

Around the same time, the City of Lincoln established an agreement between the Lincoln Police Department (LPD) and The Malone Community Center, known as Hold Cops Accountable. I was selected as the chair of the policy subcommittee, where I analyzed policing data and formulated policy recommendations for LPD's Use of Force policy. Following Senator Chambers' retirement, I returned home to Virginia and assumed the role of Director of Operations at the Georgetown University Prisons and Justice Initiative.

Tell us more about the Prisons & Justice Initiative at Georgetown.

PJI was founded in 2016 to confront the urgent issue of mass incarceration. Our goal is to empower individuals impacted by mass incarceration, offering them opportunities to shape their own futures. PJI is committed to providing access to education and employment for both currently and formerly incarcerated individuals across Washington, D.C. and Maryland. Our programming spans three core areas: Prison Education, Reentry Programming, and Wrongful Convictions.



What advice would you have for current students, particularly those who might want to follow a similar path after graduation?

Life is too short. Pursue what brings you joy and fulfillment. Are there problems you want to see solved in your lifetime? Let your passions guide you. While the challenges may seem daunting, remember that the systems governing us today were created by people, and we have the power to dismantle them. Together, we can build new systems that truly embody the values our society claims to hold dear: freedom, justice, and rehabilitation. Strive to leave the world better than you found it. Lead by example and be the change you wish to see.

For more information about the Prisons and Justice Initiative, visit prisonsandjustice.georgetown.edu. You can also reach out to Virginia directly via LinkedIn, or by email at vh167@georgetown.edu.

OPPORTUNITIES OF INTEREST FOR LPS STUDENTS

LPS Student Advisory Board is currently recruiting new members!

In the coming weeks, there will be an email sent out that explains the application process! All LPS majors are welcome and encouraged to apply!

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Many Lives of Andrew Young Exhibit

FEB 27 - MAR 1 Cowles Library, Reading Room

The Comparison Project Roads to Religion

MAR 3 3PM Olmsted Center, Parents Hall

2024 Global Citizenship Forum: Faculty Panel - "How Do We Make the World Better?"*

MAR 7 11AM Meredith Hall, 106

*Professor Malik and Professor Purdum will be presenting