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Assistant legal adviser at A&M enjoys job as student attorney

By Anita Anderson Reporter

He fights for tenants' rights. He handles the paperwork and fragile emotions in divorce cases. He handles criminal litigation. He is Alex Walter, an assistant legal adviser at Texas A&M.
"The single largest category of cases that comes through our office is tenant-landlord disputes," Walter said. "These are usually settled out of court. We send out demand letters (through) certified mail, return receipt requested. The apartment management has seven days in which to comply or risk further legal action, namely a lawsuit."

"If the case goes to court, a judgment in favor of my client would be for three times the original deposit amount plus court costs and legal fees. The demand letter usually clears up the matter."
The Office of Student's Attorney gives legal advice on a variety of topics and recommends attorneys in private practice when necessary.

Since the office receives a portion of its funding from the University, the attorneys cannot represent one student against another. To do so would constitute a conflict of interest.

In such cases, the office recommends another attorney not affiliated with A&M.
The second most frequent type of case deals with family law, usually divorce, Walter said.
"We see so many student divorce cases because of the combined difficulties of a first marriage and going to school," he said. "These pressures can make for an unbearable situation."
"We can't represent clients in divorce cases. If the divorce is uncontested and there is no community property or children involved, we can prepare all the necessary filing forms. An uncontested case is usually something the student can do his or herself with our help, therefore making the added expense of private counsel unnecessary."

Walter also deals with consumer problems such as car repair rip-offs, auto accidents and traffic tickets, and minor criminal matters, usually DWI and public intoxication cases.
"The idea of student attorney appealed to me," Walter said. "Working on a college campus offers the



Alex Walter, assistant legal adviser at Texas A&M

Photo by Sarah Cowan

ability to interact with different departments, serve on committees and give talks to fraternities and dorms. I wouldn't be doing that with a law firm."
At A&M, Walter said, he is responsible for his clients and can usually see results right away.
"We have the ability to litigate, which keeps this job interesting," he said. "We gain a great deal of negotiation experience."
Being a single professional at a university is not much different than the single life at law school, he said.
"It's difficult to meet people," he said. "You spend so much time at the University that friendships and relationships are likely to evolve from the people you come in contact with most. In law school you are around the same group of people for three years, so coming here from law school is not a big transition in that respect."

The summer of Walter's first year in law school was spent as a clerk in the Fort Bend District Attorney's Office.
"My time was totally spent putting together a witness file for a murder case," he said. "I had to try and get

information on potential witnesses, where to find them and their value to the case."

Walter had defined his career choice a long time ago and remained undaunted in his quest for his Juris Doctor, which he received in 1983 from Texas Tech.
"I'm one of those rare people who always knew what they wanted to do," he said. "I've known I wanted to be a lawyer since I was about 7. I saw the ability to use a legal education as a way to help people."

Even though Walter believes the public has a low opinion of the legal profession, he realizes that sentiment is not without basis.
"I seemed to pick a strange time to go into law," he said. "People look upon defense attorneys with disdain. They question the idea of defending someone you know is guilty. In the highly publicized personal-injury cases, some lawyers end up looking like they don't care about people and are only concerned with turning a fast buck."

"An argument can be made that the advent of lawyer advertising has cheapened the profession. I can only work at being my best and show people we aren't all bad."
He said he believes he can get a conviction without videotaped testimony.
Noble was imprisoned at the Texas Department of Corrections Gainesville unit.
She will be eligible to be released on bail after she is transferred to El Paso County Jail in four to six weeks.
Noble's co-defendant, Gayle Stuckler Dove, 43, was convicted in October 1986 of six child sexual abuse counts.
She was sentenced to life imprisonment.
The conviction was overturned.
At her retrial in March, she was convicted on one child sexual abuse count and sentenced to 20 years. Prosecutors did not use videotaped testimony.
Dove is appealing that conviction.

Walter, a Houston native, came to A&M shortly after passing the bar exam about three years ago.
"I like it here," he said. "Life in College Station is not as fast-paced or pressured as a big city. The attractiveness of Houston being so close to it makes it easy to visit family and friends."
Two mounds of paperwork on both sides of him are some indication of how full his days are.

"A typical day consists of eight appointments — four in the morning, another four in the afternoon usually lasting a half hour," he said. "The remainder of the day is spent in meetings, maintaining correspondence with other professionals and preparing legal drafts like petitions, wills and affidavits."
Walter genuinely enjoys being in this area and has developed quite an interest in education law, but the future holds a different goal.

"In about 10 years I can see myself as an agent for pro athletes or as counsel for a sports franchise," he said. "In these fields I can combine my two main interests — sports and the law."
Volumes of the Southwest Reporter line the entire back wall of Walter's Bizzell Hall office. His soft yet assertive tone radiates sincerity, making his interest in student problems believable.
"Money is not the big thing," he said. "Helping people means more to me than the salary. It is more important for me to enjoy what I'm doing and to make a difference."

Walter was one of 10 recipients of the 1986 President's Meritorious Award. The award, which had just been created, is given to staff members voted best in their work for the University and other people. Personality and attitude are also main considerations for the \$500 award.
Mariann Seigert, Walter's secretary, describes him as hardworking, yet easygoing.
"He tries to help people out as much as he can, sometimes to the point of exhausting himself," Seigert said. "He's the best boss I've ever had. He is understanding, patient and just super. I haven't met anyone who didn't like him."

As the sun goes down on another day and the secretary closes up the office, Walter can still be found diligently working toward a very basic idea — trying to help people.

Father of abused youngster will testify for second time

EL PASO (AP) — A father who testified at the sexual abuse trial of his son's pre-school teacher said it won't be easy, but he's ready to testify at a second trial now that the teacher's conviction has been overturned.
"No, the anguish will probably be the same," the unidentified father told the El Paso Times. "Having to get up there and report the morbid things that happened to your child is, when you tell it, almost like you were raped yourself."
The retired El Paso police officer's son testified by videotape in the March 1986 child sex abuse trial of El Paso YMCA day-care teacher Michelle Noble.
Noble, 37, was convicted on 18 counts, but a state appeals court last week reversed the conviction.

The court's decision was based on a July ruling by the Texas 8th District Court of Appeals that videotaped testimony is unconstitutional.
Prosecutors in Noble's trial used videotaped testimony from eight children, ages 3 to 5.
The children had attended East Valley YMCA.
The father said the parents of five of the eight children involved in the case are drafting a statement about the conviction reversal so they all wouldn't have to confront reporters. He said the statement would include the parents' reactions and feelings, and explore how they might approach a second trial.
Noble had been sentenced to life plus 311 years.
District Attorney Steve Simmons said Friday the woman would be tried again.

Assailants open fire on singer

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Two unknown attackers shot and killed popular singer Victor Yturbe when he opened the front door of his home and they opened fire, officials said Monday.
A report issued by the town hall at Tlalneantla, a residential suburb of Mexico City, said the two men knocked on Yturbe's door at 11 p.m. Sunday and fired five bullets into him when he answered.
The government news agency Notimex reported that Yturbe's wife, Irma Perez de Anda, told police he had been watching television in his pajamas when she heard knocks on the door. She said she heard her husband go to answer the door, then she heard the gunfire.

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