



Ayham Dahlan '25

**“PEOPLE ARE NATURALLY
ADVERSARIAL, BUT THAT DOESN'T
MEAN THERE ISN'T ROOM FOR
COMPROMISE.”**

Growing up a Palestinian-American in Southern California, the descendant of refugees, California Western 3L Ayham Dahlan has always had his eye on compromise. Early on, Ayham recognized that he was “blessed to have a passion for reading and writing,” and found a natural desire to be an advocate for those who might not have those same abilities, “to use language for good, to empower other people.”

In high school, Ayham was an avid member of the debate team, and at Cal Poly Pomona he turned his inclination for advocacy into a full-fledged aspiration to become an international diplomat. Ayham majored in political science and became the head delegate of Model United Nations, the treasurer and programming chairman of the Political Science Club, and the Associated Students assistant attorney general.

Ayham also began work at a nonprofit helping refugee families in the local community, providing referrals to psychiatric and mental health support. Time and again, he found that the families he was working with often needed legal aid as much as anything else. “I felt so impassioned by what they were telling me. And I wanted to help; I wanted to counsel them. But it just wasn’t in my capacity,” says Ayham, who then realized that the next step in his career would have to be law school.

As a Southern California native, Ayham knew the value of California Western’s location in downtown San Diego. He knew he would have sunshine, good food, and a diverse population surrounding him, and he soon learned how central the school is to the San Diego legal community—in walking distance of the DA’s office, the courts, and San Diego’s largest law firms, with alumni to be found at all levels and in every legal field throughout the city. “We are San Diego’s law school,” says Ayham. “And Cal Western alumni have played such a pivotal role in making me feel settled into this school. My mentor—an employment attorney for one of the city’s largest firms—is an alum, and he’s inspired me a lot and is guiding me toward success in my future.”

Arriving on campus, Ayham experienced the typical challenges of any 1L. The first in his family to attend law school, Ayham admits it was a “culture shock for me and for others like me, who were never told what law school is like. No one tells you how important IRAC (issue, rule, analysis, conclusion) is going to be.” Being the conscientious advocate that he is, this year Ayham cofounded and became the inaugural vice president of CWSL’s First-Generation Law Student Association, which helps others adapt quickly to the steep learning curve. Two years ago, though, Ayham went through it alone—learning, for instance, that his flare for creative writing did not immediately

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translate to as much success in the law school classroom as it does on Yelp, where he is an Elite Squad reviewer, sharing his musings on cuisine throughout San Diego.

Once he found his learning groove, though, Ayham fully embraced the law school experience—finding transformative professors, taking every opportunity he could to build his network, and filling his resume with impressive internships, clerkships, and student leadership positions. Ayham credits Professor Jessica Fink and her constitutional law class as being profoundly influential in shaping the way he thinks about the law, “understanding its foundations and why our legal system gets respect around the world. Coming from a family of immigrants, I can appreciate that not all countries have a legal system that is as reliable as ours is.” Ayham also cannot say enough good things about Professor Robert Waller’s advanced negotiation class, which allows him to practice navigating real-world scenarios with clients and other attorneys. “I know I’m being prepared to do things the right way. What a class!”

Last summer, Ayham was privileged to intern with Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch, one of San Diego’s biggest law firms, and get hands-on training from experienced attorneys in health care and education, employment, and intellectual property law—three areas he had been eager to delve into.



Ayham was particularly grateful to receive the San Diego County Bar Association’s Diversity Fellowship, which facilitated the internship, giving him his first real-world experience with civil litigation—which he now sees as the direction he’d like to take with his career.

For the upcoming school year, Ayham will serve as the president of the Student Bar Association and the Middle Eastern Law Student Association. In each of these leadership roles, Ayham’s emphasis will be on building connections. Having been the beneficiary of these networks himself, Ayham intends to develop strong relationships with alumni and help students meet mentors who can nurture their growth as attorneys. Ayham feels especially grateful to have these positions during California Western’s centennial celebration. “For the last 100 years, this school has created great attorneys that succeed in this city and throughout the

country. I think it’s the perfect moment for the school to restate its commitments and to spread the word that it’s one of the best places for young, diverse, ambitious individuals who want to get immersed in the law.”

Heading into his last year on campus, Ayham is open to what awaits him on the other side. He knows he wants to be part of a civil litigation firm. “I have the energy to work all those hours, and I’m excited to start representing people,” whether in labor and employment, health care, or technology. Ayham has begun interviewing with firms and remains true to the values that have always driven him—he is looking for a place where compromise is a priority: “Because of who I am—because I want to practice the law in a way that isn’t about being adversarial.”