

**“I WANT TO BE A VOICE  
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# Zarina Sementelli '25

“I want to be a voice for my community and for people who are often silenced,” says 3L Zarina Sementelli. And when she says voice, she means it literally, since she is an aspiring attorney and an already accomplished rapper. Entering her third year at California Western and one step closer to fulfilling a lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer, Zarina continues to look for ways to use her skills of expression—in music and performance, in the classroom and the courtroom—and put them to use advocating for the underprivileged and oppressed.

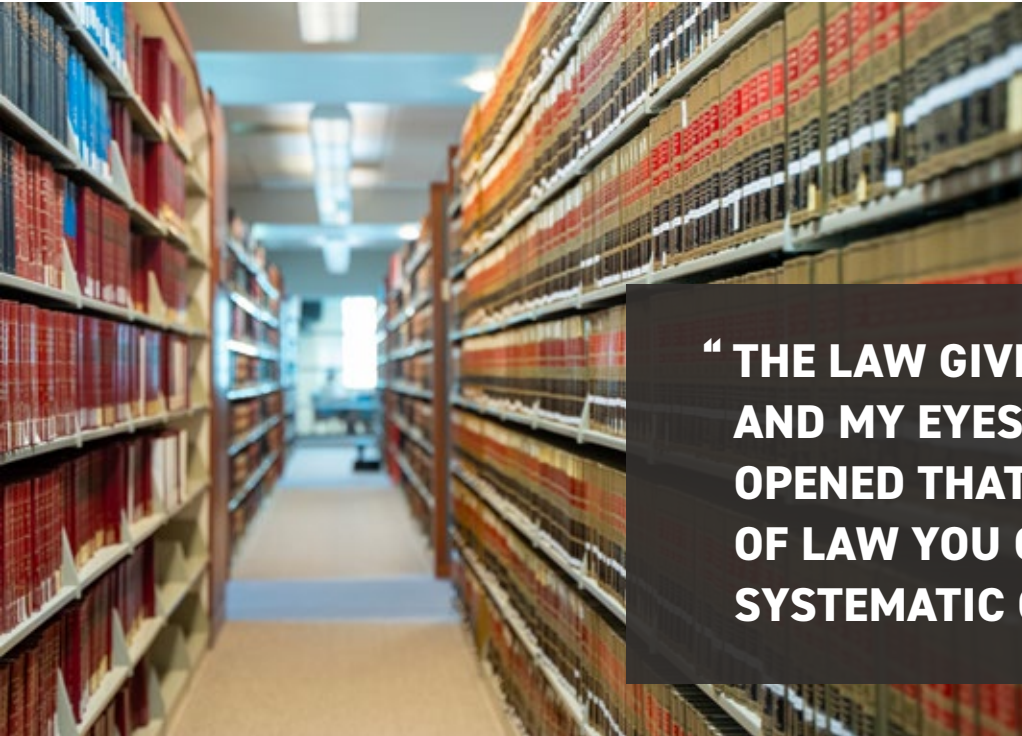
Originally from St. Paul, Minnesota, Zarina grew up watching *Law and Order* and knew she wanted to be like the lawyers she saw on TV, “advocating for the little guy. I also wanted to be a superstar actress,” says Zarina with a smile, who was equally passionate about finding ways to express herself creatively—and vocally. She was an avid member of her high school debate team and of the Mock Trial team at Spelman College, where she received her B.A. in women’s studies. While at Spelman, Zarina became a student of historical civil rights movements and a leader in contemporary ones.

Threading her interests together, Zarina focused her undergraduate studies on the connections

between music and social justice. She learned how women like Fannie Lou Hamer would sing for constituents to inspire political action and perseverance. During this time, Zarina also began her own musical career performing throughout Atlanta, drawing inspiration from Hamer and from her favorite rap artist 2Pac, who also used his music to address social and political concerns.

Toward the end of her time at Spelman and seeing the opportunity to pursue rap full time, Zarina started to get cold feet about law school. Doubts started to creep in about whether she would fit in and succeed in law school—she didn’t have anyone in her family who’d been or who she could look to as a role model. Fortunately, for Zarina and for the California Western community, one of her best friends told her, “Girl, you better do both.” Zarina notes how important it is for students like her to have a support system, which is what inspired her to found California Western’s First-Generation Law Students Association, which is entering its inaugural year.

When Zarina was accepted to California Western, there was something fateful about it—as an aspiring performer, she’d always imagined she’d end up in California. “And purple is my



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favorite color.” Since her first year in 2022, Zarina has been fully absorbed in her studies, in networking, and in her internship with the public defender’s office. She has also continued to find ways to uplift the school with her voice. For her Evidence final, she created a rap outlining all the material that would be covered and shared it with her peers. Turns out, she received her highest law school grade in that class.

“Law school has stretched me to another level of what I thought I was capable of,” says Zarina, who feels grateful for the challenges she’s had to face. “It’s been rewarding to see how far I can push myself. Showing people where I’m from, what I’m capable of. That I won’t give up.” She is highly motivated to succeed—and to uplift others as she does. “The law gives power, and my eyes have been opened that in every area of the law you can make systemic change.” In Constitutional Law with Professor Roy and Criminal Procedure with Professor Sheley, Zarina says she realized “what you’re up against” in trying to uproot racism from our justice system, but also that, without understanding our history, “in 2024, we can become ungrateful for the privileges and immunities we have.” She also felt newly empowered as a legal practitioner by Civil Procedure with Professor Pathak, being pushed to excel in understanding the intricate logistics of the law.

Though Zarina is undecided on where she would like to end up as a lawyer, she is confident she will be “an advocate for change, in the boardroom or the courtroom.” As an artist, she has her eye on intellectual property and entertainment law, and she is currently applying for an internship with the Navy JAG, feeling called by its culture of “servant-leadership.” She is making the most of her last year on campus, nurturing the community that has helped give her strength. Last year, she worked as a CWSL Admissions representative, and this year, in addition to her role as president of the First-Generation Law Students Association, Zarina will be serving as president of the Black Law Students Association (BLSA). “BLSA helped me get through 1L. I would just go to a meeting and cry, and I had people who were there, who had gone through it. I needed to have a community of people to look up to and lean on,” says Zarina, who is now looking to pay the kindness forward. “My main goal is to lift as we rise. For people who show up not expecting to see anyone who looks like them, I want to provide an environment for people just to exist. Merely existing is radical.”