Kristen (Larson) Peterson (B.S. Economics/B.A. History, 2006)

Kristen Peterson has always set her sights on the finish line—the finish line has just changed throughout her life. It used to be an actual finish line of a cross country or track race during high school, where she was a Panther at Pike Valley High School in Scandia, Kansas, or later as a Hornet at ESU. Now her finish line is winning a court case she defends in Montana's Supreme Court as an assistant appellate defender in Helena, Montana. The race she ran to get there went right through Emporia State University.

Peterson decided to take the Emporia State University path because having grown up in a small town, Emporia was the right size for her. "It wasn't too big or too small. I have always loved the Flint Hills, and I had a great college visit," she recalled. "I remember visiting ESU on a beautiful spring day, and I loved the atmosphere of the school and the welcoming people. It felt like a great place to attend college, which turned out to be true. I was impressed by the coaches and athletic program, too," she said.

She decided to major in history but after the first day of an introductory economics class her sophomore year she was hooked. "I loved the idea of studying why people make the choices they do. I don't remember ever being so excited about a field after the first day of class as I did about economics," she said. So she decided to pick up economics along her race course and graduated as a double major.

Peterson graduated with two degrees in four years. One was a B.A. in History, the other was a B.S in Economics in 2006. She took her ESU economics degree to the University of Colorado Law School where she graduated in 2010 with a juris doctorate. She said she felt like her degrees from ESU prepared her for law school in Colorado. "The classes challenged me intellectually. I learned at ESU that reaching out to the professors outside of class could really help on tough topics. That proved true when I was in law school at the University of Colorado at Boulder, too."

She also attributes her success to her professors. "Professor Rob Catlett worked very hard to help me be successful at ESU and after graduation," she said. "I had some terrific professors and classes while at ESU, and I do miss learning in those classes." She also enjoyed her time with her teammates and her race success. "Another good memory I have is the satisfaction of running my personal bests in college and going faster than I ever thought I could."

appeal their conviction or commitment to the Montana Supreme Court," she said. Her job requires her to use extensive critical thinking and writing skills as well as communication skills when she talks to her clients about their legal situations or has to argue in court for her clients. "My writing, analytical and critical thinking skills that I developed at ESU are skills I use daily in my work," said Peterson.

When she is not working, Peterson enjoys experiencing the great outdoors of Montana with her husband, Scott, who also is a lawyer, her 8-year-old stepson, Dean, and her newborn daughter, Lucy. They also enjoy traveling and visiting their extended families.

She has a few words of advice for incoming and current ESU economics students as they run their races. "I'd like to tell students to work hard, don't make stupid decisions, and set your sights high, and you'll be surprised what you can do and where you'll end up!"

If everyone followed Peterson's advice, they might just find themselves setting the pace and crossing the finish line in first place.

Her hard work in the classroom and help from professors like Catlett are what pushed Peterson to keep running her race and striving for the finish line in all she does. After law school she worked as a law clerk for The Honorable Justice Jim Rice of the Montana Supreme Court in Helena, Montana, for a year. She then became an assistant appellate defender in Helena in 2011. "In my current job I am an attorney for indigent criminal defendants and civilly committed individuals who desire to