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Mentoring program offers suitable career advice



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Leslie Arnould, a first-year student at Northwestern University School of Law (left), Emily Hu, also a first-year at Northwestern, and Rebecca Stamey-White, a second-year student at Northwestern and president of the Women's Leadership Coalition at the school, listen to advice from Connie Moore, an image specialist at Ann Taylor, as part of a mentoring program through Kirkland & Ellis.

By Pat Milhizer
Law Bulletin staff writer

Of all the places you might think law students could find career-related advice, a store on Michigan Avenue probably doesn't come to mind.

But that's exactly where many women from Northwestern University School of Law got a lesson on how to dress for various occasions that they're going to face in their upcoming careers.

A group at the school is in its second year of a partnership with the Women's Leadership Initiative at Kirkland & Ellis LLP. The program pairs 45 students with 45 attorneys who provide mentoring and career advice. The latest event took

them to Ann Taylor on a recent Thursday night.

"It doesn't have an office feeling to it," said Kirkland & Ellis partner Robin A. McCue. "So I think it's a little bit easier to mingle, and it puts everybody on a similar playing field. I think it allows for more dialogue and open interaction."

Indeed, it did.

As the attendees sipped wine and eyed 15 percent discounts on clothes, Ann Taylor staff provided suggestions on how to dress in work, formal and casual settings.

For example, simple alterations such as rolling up sleeves, popping a collar or adding accessories can turn a white shirt and dress pants into something a little

more stylish. When buying business suits, the women were reminded to button the jacket and check the shoulder pads to ensure that they're not too bulky.

If it's OK to wear jeans in business casual settings, dark denim pants are the way to go instead of the faded or ripped variety.

In many of the situations, it seemed like the best advice the staff offered was, "If you don't know, ask."

In addition to the clothing tips last month, the program has been helpful in giving the students a chance to learn about the job interview process and how to choose a firm, said Lilly Altshuler, a second-year law student who is the orientation mentorship chair of the Women's

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Leadership Coalition at Northwestern.

“It’s been a really great experience,” Altshuler said. “Everything you would think a program like this would be, it has been enormously helpful.”

So helpful, in fact, that Rebecca Stamey-White, another second-year student, will work as a summer associate this year at the firm’s San Francisco office.

“I really thought there was a good network of women in the organization, and the events were well attended,”

Stamey-White said. “My mentor was really great and reached out to me. It didn’t feel like she was pushing me toward Kirkland but more just talking about the experience.”

The program and events such as the Ann Taylor outing can be a practical way for firms to recruit women in law school, said Sheila Nielsen, president of Nielsen Career Consulting in Chicago.

“The new associate pool is going to consist of more women, and it’s a nod to

that fact. With that recognition comes with this understanding that sometimes women feel more comfortable doing things that women naturally gravitate to,” Nielsen said.

“Sometimes we have heard complaints from women feeling that they’re out of the loop. That men are doing interesting things like going to a game or playing golf,” Nielsen said. “It’s not that it’s ‘get back time,’ so much as it’s let’s allow women to have a comfort level, too.”