

# CHICAGO LAWYER®

# Different Paths

The road from 1L to first-year isn't a straight shot anymore, as these brand-new associates share

BY PAUL DAILING



**DANIELLE O'NEAL,  
KIRKLAND & ELLIS**

Danielle O'Neal, a first-year intellectual property associate at Kirkland, was in class all day during law school.

From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays she was a student at the DePaul University College of Law's downtown campus in the South Loop,

then from 4 to 7 p.m. she taught as a fully tenured microbiology and human anatomy professor at Kennedy-King College at 63rd and Halsted Streets. Fridays were relatively relaxed — she didn't have law school classes and “only” taught for five hours that day.

“I developed becoming a night person because that's just what had to happen,” she said, laughing, when asked when she would study.

O'Neal, 35, was originally from Chicago, but grew up in Denver. Her father was a corporate attorney for MetLife, but she wanted to be a doctor. She decided that wasn't her fate either, but enjoyed the sciences and headed into academia.

In addition to becoming a tenured professor, she also started working as a sales consultant for a lab equipment company. She worked with, in her words, “lots of patent attorneys” and started reconsidering.

“In that time I really became fascinated with patent law, IP law and I finally called my father and said ‘I'm going to be an attorney.’ I think he couldn't believe it,” O'Neal said.

Although she was in her 30s when she applied to law school, she said her age made her a better student. The professor had work experience, dedication and wanted to be the “kind of student I like to teach.”

“Of course, the majority are people [joining the legal ranks] are fresh from law school, but I feel there is more diversity now in terms of ages,” O'Neal said.

After law school, she was looking at IP boutiques, but ended up instead at the largest law firm in the state of Illinois.

“Kirkland actually found me,” she said.

As a 1L in 2015, she applied to a diversity scholar program. The relationships she developed there with Kirkland attorneys paid off when her own job search started. She's been at Kirkland since last year and loves it.

And she doesn't have to drive across town midday anymore.

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