

In Their Words: Diversity Fellowships Make A Difference

By **Brandon Lowrey**

Law360 (August 17, 2021, 3:02 PM EDT) -- Despite years of efforts to increase diversity, the legal profession has routinely fallen short of its goals.

But one metric provides some small measure of hope for a more equitable future: Summer associate programs are slightly more diverse than law schools, favoring women, people of color and LGBTQ people, according to a National Association for Law Placement study.

An increasing number of law firms have begun offering fellowships to law students who meet certain diversity requirements, combining scholarships, summer associate programs and other incentives to draw new attorneys from a broader cross-section of the population than ever before.

Here, Law360 speaks with some recent fellows about the difference that these programs have made in their lives.

NICOLE JOHNSON

Incoming associate, Stinson LLP

First, the fellowship offered financial support, which is extremely important to me, because I am a single mother with two children. And as a nontraditional law student, I think it was very important to be able to have that financial support so that I could focus on my education and my career, and not have to worry about supporting my children in the same way I would have had to worry about it had I not gotten the fellowship.

And as a first generation law student, it means a lot to my family, and to my children and their future to be able to work at Stinson and to have gotten this fellowship, it means a lot for their future as well.

I was very pleased to find support and mentorship across the firm and across practice areas. With this diversity fellowship, they have really put their money where their mouth is in terms of their dedication to increasing the diversity in their firm. And that's evident not just with the number of diverse summer associates and associates that I've met, but also by the attitudes of the firm.



I came into a place that embraced me with open arms, and where I feel like I can build my career in a safe environment.

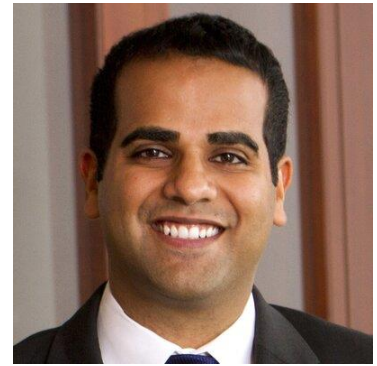
KARAN JHURANI

Associate, Fish & Richardson PC

I had applied to every single firm, as people did back then in 2012. I applied to Fish, and they were one of the few firms to offer opportunities, and, in addition, the diversity fellowship. That was really actually my first interaction with an employer; everywhere else that I'd applied to said, 'Good luck. Try again next year. We're just not hiring.'

That fellowship really was a driver for me to begin looking at Fish & Richardson and actively considering it. The more I looked, the more I liked it.

They extended the offer. And after that, it was a no-brainer. I came back the next summer, and then the summer after that, and now, I'm heavily involved in Fish's diversity initiative. I currently do a lot of work for the allyship committee as a co-chair. And I'm really front and center on everything we do, including in our elevation process from each year in associate ranks.



VEENA TRIPATHI

Associate, Fish & Richardson PC

I think sometimes it's hard to see a place for yourself at, you know, an elite firm, or at a law firm in general, or in the field of intellectual property

So providing that space and providing mentors really was huge. I think some of the folks that I go to for career advice I met strictly because of that program, or made an effort to reach out to me and build a bridge. I'm not sure that would have been the case 10, 15, 20 years ago. So it has meant a lot to me to be a part of the program. I think the firm has seen a lot of success as well. It has been really valuable for me, personally and professionally, to be a part of it. So I feel really grateful to have been a fellow at Fish.



JACOB HANNA

Associate, Cooley LLP

I tried assignments from corporate, litigation and pro bono to get a sense of what type of work I would do as a first year associate at Cooley. I socialized with the other summer associates, and enjoyed lunches and dinners networking with partners and associates. In short, I learned a lot about big law generally and Cooley specifically.

As someone who paid for law school entirely with loans, the fellowship's \$30,000 stipend was very important to me as well. Now, as an associate, the fellowship remains very important to me as a source of some of our best



talent – the diverse 1Ls that we get an opportunity to meet through the fellowship application process are incredibly impressive.

JAMES STREET

[Inaugural diversity fellow, Robinson Bradshaw LLP](#)

As a Black and Tuscarora first-generation student, the information that I have about the legal profession is very limited in comparison to the information that other law students have. Fortunately, fellowships like the one Robinson Bradshaw offers help tear down the wall that stands between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the information that is indispensable to an equal career foundation.



The scholarship also gave me much-needed financial relief after the COVID-19 pandemic and ensured that I could participate fully in the summer program without any monetary barriers. Because I used the scholarship in part to finance summer housing, I was able to explore many areas of Charlotte, get involved with local communities, and get a head start in choosing where I would live. Without the fellowship, my summer would not have been as enriching as it was. Words promoting diversity are one thing; but actions promoting diversity make the real difference in students' lives.

GREGG HILL

[Inaugural diversity fellow, Robinson Bradshaw LLP](#)

Of course, the financial help with law school is extremely helpful, but the fellowship means so much more. Going into law school, I understood that my first-year internship was very important. I have succeeded academically my whole life, and although the first-year law school experience was very challenging, I was more focused on the summer internship and having a good start to my legal career.

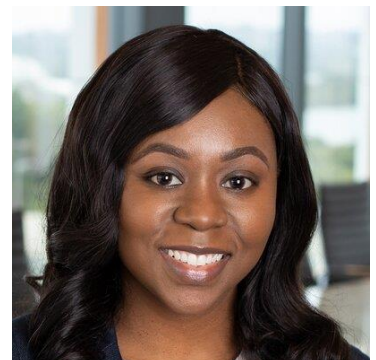


Receiving the fellowship made me feel like I belonged and that I was on the right track. I remember getting the call from [Robinson Bradshaw's Recruitment Committee Chair] Adam Doerr with the fellowship offer, and it was truly one of the best days I had during the year. In addition, it meant a lot to me that Robinson Bradshaw emphasizes increased minority representation and is a firm that understands the value of diversity.

TRACEA RICE

[Associate, Fish & Richardson PC](#)

I would hope that this fellowship gives me an opportunity to, for one, open more doors for people who look like me to help reshape any improper narrative or implicit biases that exist around people of color.



By simply being here, we're showing that we're intelligent, driven, talented, creative individuals who truly belong here. When I look at these programs,

for me personally, the biggest thing that I would hope it would allow me to do is to inspire little brown girls to set their eyes on heights that they had never really fathomed they could achieve.

The reality is that Black and brown people, we're doctors, we're engineers or scientists, we're patent attorneys. And our future generations won't believe that trajectory is necessarily possible for them until we're given the opportunity to exist in these spaces, so to speak. I guess I shouldn't really use the word 'exist,' because we don't merely exist here.

We thrive in these spaces.

--Editing by Pamela Wilkinson, John Campbell and Kerry Benn. Graphics by Chris Yates.

Excerpts have been edited for length and clarity.

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