

ARTICLES

Alumni Spotlight with Josephine M. Bahn

Josephine M. Bahn was a judicial intern with the Honorable Fernando J. Gaitan Jr. of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Missouri.

June 26, 2023

Please tell me a little about yourself generally, and specifically what compelled you to go to law school?

I'm a first-generation college and law student who has wanted to be a lawyer since I read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In tenth grade, I saw Atticus Finch as this beacon of hope—a helper—and that's how I identified lawyers, as helpers. From the outset, I've tried to follow that path.

What made you want to pursue an internship through the Judicial Intern Opportunity Program (JIOP)? Please also tell us about your experience.

Getting the chance to work for a federal judge wasn't something I even knew about when I entered law school. My first-year legal writing professor discussed clerkships and the way we could hone and craft our litigation and research skills as new lawyers by working for a judge. I found JIOP as a way to gain skills I didn't know I needed as a lawyer. I spent the first summer after law school in Kansas City, Missouri, where I saw amazing (and terrible) advocacy, had the chance to see all aspects of litigation (including a mediation!), and had the chance to write on behalf of a federal judge. Those seven weeks helped me determine that I wanted to be a litigator—and a good one at that.

What was something that you learned through your judicial internship that influences you still today as an attorney?

You can disagree without being disagreeable. Kansas City is a smallish bar—not unlike the construction bar I practice in today. You're bound to have another case against opposing counsel, so it's best to be kind but firm, advocate zealously, while being fair, and remain cordial in what otherwise can be a competitive profession.

The goal of JIOP is, of course, to provide opportunities to students who are members of groups that are historically underrepresented in the legal field. As a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion, do you think that JIOP has been integral to achieving better inclusion in the legal field?

Without a doubt. JIOP has provided opportunity for placements for folks who would otherwise never have an opportunity—myself included.

What advice do you have for law students contemplating doing a judicial internship through JIOP?

Do it! I can tie every legal job I have had to the opportunity I was first afforded in the program. The foundational skills and exposure are unlike any other program out there.

What advice do you have for women who are entering the legal profession? Any landmines we should miss as we start out?

It will be bumpy. You've chosen a profession that until recently didn't include you or make rules with your needs in mind. Consider your boundaries and what you're willing to do, and be incredibly upfront with a current or future employer outlining that. If your current or future employer isn't OK with your boundaries, you probably aren't a good fit for that role. And that's OK. I've had three different lifetimes as a young lawyer—in only 6.5 years. It's OK to start over to find the right one.

What are your hobbies and/or what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I have two kiddos who take up the bulk of my down time, between swim, gymnastics, and ballet. I also love a good book and hanging with our lab mix, Teddy.