

PUBLICATION

Common Ground

Summer 2024

Allison Kennington and Kylei Sarwar were summer associates at Baker Donelson who volunteered to participate in an episode of *Diversity Ever After*, Baker Donelson's D&I podcast. They had not met previously but during the podcast, they learned they share common ground despite being at different law schools, in different states, with different backgrounds. Their discussion provides a great inside look at the importance of belonging and self-care to law students, who are the future of the legal profession.

Allison: It was good to meet you on the podcast, Kylei. I know you were not at the 2L retreat since you are a 1L, so I am happy we got to connect. I want to start off by saying your discussion about being nervous going into your law school experience really resonated with me.

Kylei: Allison, it was great to meet you as well. Thank you for being supportive during the podcast recording. I think we, as law students, forget that we are all in a place of the unknown. I am grateful the podcast was a comfortable space to voice those experiences.

Allison: How did you deal with the stress of balancing your life during your 1L year?

Kylei: I could go on and on about the many conversations I had with my support system about the struggles of law school. Ultimately, I prioritized my self-care. Whether that was scheduling time in my day to workout, or watch my guilty-pleasure reality TV show, I set aside time in my planner for myself and used it.

Allison: I think I am similar and set aside time for myself as well. I really enjoy using creative outlets as my "me-time." I particularly like to write or start on a new creative project, like sewing costumes. Burnout is very real. By prioritizing my creative projects, I can stay on task for school and avoid it.

Kylei: That is one thing I really admire about you and enjoyed learning about in the podcast. I think the perception of law school and the legal practice is that you cannot be creative or have creative endeavors because of the nature of the legal work to be done. You're proving that you can have that balance and be successful.

Allison: Thank you for that. We seem to have different ways of prioritizing time for self-care, but it sounds like we both still experience similar situations of navigating the nervousness and unknown aspects of law school and summer opportunities. So, I am interested in knowing how important experiencing a feeling of belonging was to you when you decided where to work this summer.

Kylei: It was a top priority to be in an environment that felt comfortable to me because everything we do in our first year and summer is new to us. You have to be in a place where you can feel comfortable admitting what you do not know and seeking resources to help find the answer. My summer at Baker Donelson allowed me the opportunity to grow by having mentors I could go to.

As a 2L, what did that look like to you at Baker Donelson compared to your previous summer?

Allison: My experience last summer was with a small office in a temporary position that I knew would not be available following graduation. The feeling of being temporary permeated the experience. This summer was a bigger office with more people, but it still felt comfortable to me. The people at Baker Donelson made me feel like I belonged, and I could envision myself working here. The attorneys valued my time as a summer associate and that was evident through the entire program. A feeling of belonging is a necessary precursor to doing good work and my experience at Baker Donelson prioritized that.

Now that our summer is winding down, what is your biggest motivation for tackling your second year of law school?

Kylei: My biggest motivation is knowing there is an end in sight. Experiencing my first summer at Baker Donelson inspired me to keep pursuing the legal career. It's rewarding to know the hard work I put in will one day lead me to becoming an attorney.

I'm wondering if you can name one thing you want to do differently as a 3L?

Allison: I am finally taking classes that I want to take and am interested in – like copyright law, transactional courses, and human-rights-focused classes – and I'm getting some experiential learning by doing an externship with the ACLU. I am also going to try to volunteer on campus for the Harris campaign. Overall, 3L year feels like my first opportunity to participate in the activities that inspired me to be an attorney in the first place.

Kylei: It is great to hear what you are looking forward to as a rising 3L. I am tutoring incoming 1Ls during my second year, and I can't wait to share your experience with them. It is important to remind law students that anyone can have those opportunities.

It was so great to meet you this summer. I hope 3L year is the best year yet!

Allison: Thank you, I'm sure you'll do great. Just remember to breathe through the many things that will come your way as a 2L. At the end of the day, the goal is to pass the bar. If you do everything you can while keeping that in mind, you'll achieve anything. Make sure to remind the 1Ls of that too!

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Kylei and Allison's discussion shows how important it is to create environments where all people have a sense of belonging that allows them to be their best, and share lessons learned with others who may one day walk the same (or a similar) path.