

FBA Membership Helps Law Students Find Their Passions and Land Their Dream Jobs

by Ashley Akers



Ashley Akers is the chair of the FBA's Law Student Division. She has been involved in the Law Student Division since its formation five years ago. Akers lives in Washington, D.C., and works as a trial attorney for the Department of Justice.

For law students, there has never been a better time to be a member of the Federal Bar Association. Over the last few years, the FBA has taken tremendous strides in creating value for law student members.

Students can tailor their membership to their goals. Law students who hope to move to a new community after law school can join our nationwide mentorship program and be paired with a mentor in their desired location. Law students with dreams of publishing an article can do so in *The Federal Lawyer* or in many FBA section and division newsletters. Those looking for leadership opportunities in their local chapter or at the national level can apply to become student leaders. And for the law students who dream of working as a federal law clerk, the FBA hosts clerkship panels and networking programs with federal judges and distributes resources to assist in the clerkship application process.

We know that as our law student membership grows, everyone in the FBA benefits from their involvement. Charged with new ideas and filled with passion for the law, our law student members bring life to the FBA. We feature two law students in this column who have contributed to our organization and have reaped the benefits of their membership in return. The interviews have been lightly edited for clarity.

First, meet Sofia I. Mendoza Matos, a 3L at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. Matos started her journey as a law student at the University of Puerto Rico but had to relocate stateside after Hurricane Maria. In the face of moving to Pittsburgh mid-semester, changing law schools, and adapting to a new life, Matos maintained her FBA membership and has benefited from the close-knit FBA community in her new location.



Q&A With Sofia I. Mendoza Matos

Why did you decide to study law?

With all the events happening today, this question is one that keeps adding more answers. As I grew up, I found myself advocating for equal access and understanding for different kinds of sectors in my community where I grew up. This urge of advocating for the ones in need or the ones who are marginalized or discriminated by the society is what made me decide to study law.

Why did you decide to join the FBA?

I joined the FBA during my first year of law school at the University of Puerto Rico after taking constitutional law. I discovered then that I want to keep learning about the federal law system and learn of job opportunities and the different area of law that encompass the federal practice. I decided to join my school student chapter in Puerto Rico, which operates [as] the Hon. Raymond Acosta Puerto Rico FBA Chapter. Little did I know that I would enjoy my membership so much that I would end up being the president of my school chapter and also competing in the FBA's Thurgood

Marshall Competition.

However, plans did not go accordingly and after Hurricane Maria, I relocated to Pittsburgh where I decided to stay to finish my JD. Fortunately for me, this was not the end of my membership in the FBA, since I reached out to Ashley Akers (the Law Student Division chair) and asked her how I could stay involved. She connected me with the local FBA and informed me of an opportunity to be on the national Law Student Division Board. I applied for a leadership position and was appointed from 2017-2018 to be First Circuit director. I am so thankful that I joined the FBA!

How has your FBA membership benefited you?

I have gotten various benefits from my FBA membership! FBA has given me a good networking community first in Puerto Rico and then another community that continued to help me after I transferred to the University of Pittsburgh School of Law to finish my JD. This was very important for me to have a network of lawyers when I moved to a new community in the midst of attending law school.

By participating in the Thurgood Marshall Competition as an FBA member I had the opportunity to have real-world scenarios to practice my oral advocacy and

writing skills (very important skills in the legal profession) in front of FBA members who served as judges.

FBA membership has given me opportunities to participate as a law student in CLE programs and webinars in areas of law that I am interested in. Finally, I got the opportunity to serve on the board of a national organization, which is very unique for law students.

What type of law are you interested in and why?

I'm interested in litigation, immigration, and criminal. These areas of specialization have interested me for different reasons. My interest in litigation came from various trial advocacy classes that I have taken. I've been interested in immigration since I joined an immigration clinic and also worked last summer on immigration proceedings. Specifically, I am interested in working with immigrant children seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and asylum cases. Lastly, I would like to do some criminal law work because I am a firm believer that everyone has the right to be represented and have a fair chance to plea for their innocence.

What are your plans after law school?

My goal is to work in a firm that is focused on litigation (both trial and appellate level). I'm taking the Pennsylvania bar [exam] in February 2020 and possibly the [Uniform Bar Examination]. I plan to look for job opportunities in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Next, meet Spencer Tolson, a 3L at the University of Idaho School of Law. Tolson is a member of the thriving Idaho Chapter. He has contributed in many ways to the success of the FBA through his service on the national Law Student Division Board. Fresh off a summer internship with a federal appellate judge and in the midst of federal clerkship applications, Tolson was able to use his FBA connections to get advice on how to capture a federal clerkship.



Q&A With Spencer Tolson

Why did you decide to study law?

I decided to study law because I believe it is one of the main reasons the United States has become the great country it is today. Society relies on lawyers to understand and use law to benefit their clients, which collectively benefits society.

I could not find a more important calling in life.

Why did you decide to join the FBA?

I joined the FBA in order to take advantage of its extensive network to help me in my career goals. I have found that it's a unique experi-

ence for a law student to join a nationwide organization that includes federal judges and other distinguished individuals who are willing to serve as mentors and advisers for law students and young attorneys. Additionally, as a member of the FBA, I learned that I can join FBA sections involving the areas of law that I'm interested in and through the sections, I am able meet attorneys who practice in my area of interest.

How has your FBA membership benefited you?

As a law student, I have already experienced the benefits of being part of this national organization. I have found several attorneys through the FBA willing to answer my questions and give me career advice based on their own experiences. In addition, finding a job is largely a function of *who* you know, and my membership in the FBA has given me an avenue to meet and connect with people in my field of interest that I otherwise would have never had the chance to meet. For example, I was invited to participate in monthly phone calls with attorneys in my circuit who have law practices that someday I hope to achieve.

When I was applying for federal clerkships, I took advantage of the FBA's Membership Directory and it was extremely useful.

Finally, my FBA membership has allowed me to gain leadership opportunities. After becoming an FBA member, I was able to become more involved in the programs and events hosted by my school chapter and the local chapter, and I had the opportunity to serve on the national Law Student Division Board of the FBA.

What type of law are you interested in and why?

The world is moving toward intellectual property, and I would like to focus my private practice on trademark and copyright law.

What are your plans after law school?

I have accepted a year-long clerkship with a federal judge, and plan to work in private practice afterward.

The FBA is a better organization because of law students like Matos and Tolson. Thousands of law students graduate from law school every year, many with hopes of practicing in federal courts. Whether it's as a law clerk, a JAG officer, an associate in a law firm, or in the federal government, the FBA helps law students find their passion and land their dream jobs. We hope that you will encourage law students to take advantage of these opportunities and join our organization! ☺

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