

ARTICLE

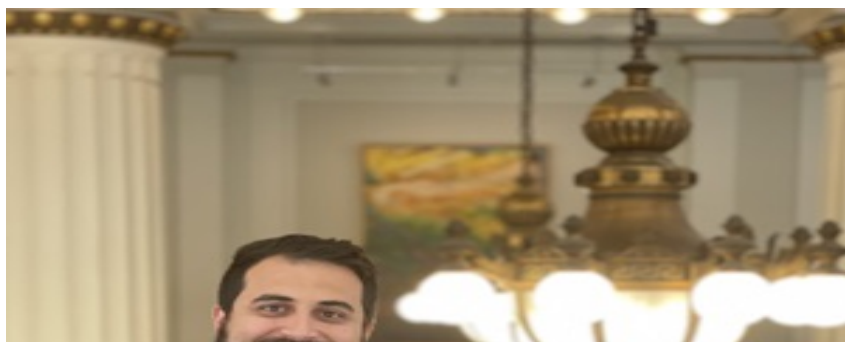
**The Summer Associate
Experience:**Gaby and Blake,
Two Diversity Scholars

Featuring insight from:

**Gabriela Ocampo
Serrano****Blake T. Welter****ARTICLES****The Summer Associate Experience: Gaby And
Blake, Two Diversity Scholars**August 10, 2022 | [Indianapolis](#)

Nearly every law student has been there – stressed out about summer employment, searching endlessly on firms’ websites, and reading dozens of partner and associate bios all in the hope of finding that perfect fit. In their search, a typical law student will quickly find that a majority of law firms have proudly espoused a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). However, for students who truly value DEI this can present a real challenge. With so many firms undertaking seemingly the same initiatives, how can students know for sure whether their top choices have a genuine commitment to DEI?

If this is where you find yourself today, know that we have been in your shoes. Hopefully it brings you comfort to learn that, not too long ago, we were fretting over this same question. As proud Latino/a law students, we hoped to find a home with a firm that respected our values and appreciated the perspectives we bring. During a combined three summers at Barnes & Thornburg, the firm has listened to our opinions (they loved our idea to write this, after all!), and actively supported our growth through mentoring and access to opportunities.





It's true – Barnes & Thornburg is one of many firms that espouse a commitment to DEI, and while the renewed consciousness around social justice issues should be celebrated and fostered, many students – especially from historically underrepresented backgrounds – are rightfully wary of any employers that offer only “lip service” about diversity initiatives. Barnes & Thornburg's Diversity Scholarship is one example of meaningful follow-through on DEI initiatives.

The firm's commitment to its diverse talent is impressive. Its Talent Resource Groups such as BTBlack, BTLatinx, and BTPride carve out important spaces within the firm, and work to cultivate an inclusive and empowering work environment. Dawn Rosemond, the firm's full-time firm diversity partner, has engaged with both of us during our summer. During one-on-one conversations with Dawn, she has listened to our vision for diversity at the firm and helped us strategize on how to make our ideas become reality. Through talented individuals like Dawn, Barnes & Thornburg has affirmed its commitment to us.

For the benefit of those considering working for Barnes & Thornburg, we feel it is important to share how B&T has fostered a sense of belonging in each of us during our time at the firm:

Blake: Barnes & Thornburg is authentic and that stood out during my first interactions with the firm. Rather than sell me on diversity initiatives, my interviewers expressed warm interest in my experience and background in a way that made me feel valued. It felt organic. I was flattered that my individual talents and achievements were held in high regard. To me, this spoke more about the firm's genuine interest in diversity than anything else could have. To make an impact with diverse candidates, it is important to do more than speak about diversity. You must also demonstrate to an aspiring attorney that your

Gaby: For me, the most meaningful thing I have learned about Barnes & Thornburg is that people are willing to listen. Accordingly, one of the most useful things that people here have taught me is that no matter how talented or dedicated you are, having a mentor who is willing to advocate for you is an invaluable asset. Joining the legal industry in such a corporate/business environment as a Latina and an immigrant is extremely intimidating, especially when Latinas represent less than 1 percent of all partners in U.S. law firms. Although I do not see the representation now in those higher seats that I would like, I do see plenty of allies. And importantly, I have benefited from their advocacy.

firm will nurture them and will do all it can to cultivate their unique talent and perspective. The firm understands this well, which is why its program to hire and retain diverse young attorneys has been making great strides.

Once I started with the firm, I took note of how deeply invested Barnes & Thornburg is in its attorneys from diverse backgrounds. Attorneys like Alejandra Reichard, Ladene Mendoza, and Jordan Oliver are celebrated for the remarkable work they have done with the firm. They are leaders at the firm, not just in diversity initiatives, but also in their practice groups outright. At the firm, we currently speak about the Diversity Scholarship program as just a scholarship, but increasingly, I see the program developing into a thriving fellowship. I am a diversity scholar in Indianapolis, but before me in Indianapolis, there was Gabriela. Before her, there was Jordan. Before him, there was Alejandra. All these individuals remain with the firm, and we are building community together.

Even more exciting is the sheer scale of this initiative as this growing fellowship extends beyond our office to include the diversity scholars at many of our 20 locations. Seeing such a diverse collective of individuals at our firm-wide summer associate retreat was an electric experience, and left me feeling hopeful and optimistic about Barnes & Thornburg's future.

Forming both personal and working relationships with people in positions of power that care about diversifying the legal field is an essential step for me to continue affirming and acting upon my commitment to DEI, and the firm has facilitated those interactions throughout my two summers here. Notably, this is where people's willingness to listen really comes into play, and where I realized that Barnes & Thornburg's commitment to DEI is in fact, not just "lip service."

As a returning summer associate, with one year left to obtain my J.D. and what feels like a million years before I even think about taking the bar, I was able to discuss diversity efforts and retention of diverse talent with Bob Grand, the firm's managing partner, who was candid about the firm's challenges and took the time to personally educate me on the firm's strategies and his experiences so far. I was also able to bounce ideas around with Dawn, who created a space for me to propose modifications to certain initiatives, and candidly expressed her own concerns and next steps during her tenure. These two individuals, who have been instrumental in the firm's DEI efforts to this day, carved time in their lives to listen. This gesture was not lost on me, and it encouraged me to keep showing up as my authentic self.

Being able to have those conversations showed me that as long as I have the initiative to create those spaces for myself and others, I can be part of a collective of individuals at this firm that want to keep bringing change. Sooner or later the law students of today will have the responsibility to create the spaces and the representation they want to see; it is my opinion that Barnes & Thornburg is willing to make that a "sooner" rather than a "later" if we have the courage to ask.

