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FROM THE LAB TO THE LAW

Growing up, Christopher Javillonar never thought about becoming a lawyer. His path through college focused on the sciences, mainly biochemistry. After earning his undergraduate degree, Javillonar began a doctoral program in molecular biology and biochemistry, but he realized that he was not happy. “It just wasn’t for me,” says Javillonar, “I was looking for something different. Little did I know that law school would be the answer.”

Encouragement from a professor in his doctoral program led Javillonar to explore the synergy between a law degree and his scientific grounding. “My background in science prepared me to understand and appreciate complex systems and information,” reflects Javillonar.

Originally Javillonar was drawn to intellectual property law, but his first year at law school and a clerkship in Chicago sparked his interest in litigation—though he questioned whether he had the right skills.

“I was definitely worried going into law school and focusing on litigation. I felt I lacked a strong background in public speaking and debate. I was a science major. I didn’t take any political science classes in college, and I thought lawyers were the kids who were in debate club in high school,” Javillonar says. “But I realized I could learn those skills and my technical background in science was useful for the details of commercial litigation.”

In law school, Javillonar was awarded the Judge John W. Calhoun Trial Practice Award for exceptional talent and enthusiasm for trial practice. “So don’t think that if you’re a scientist you wouldn’t make a good lawyer,” jokes Javillonar.

FIND A MENTOR

Javillonar is now a member of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA) and president of the Asian American Bar Association of Kansas City. He often speaks to the significance of building networks and relationships with other Asian attorneys. “When I was thinking about law school, I didn’t know any Filipino lawyers, or many Asian lawyers. There was no one for me to look to and say, ‘Hey, she’s like me and she’s successful.’”

Javillonar strongly recommends that prospective law students seek out mentors early. “Finding someone who has been through the process and can tell you what to expect will help you immensely,” he offers. “They can share their experiences and suggestions.”

To find a mentor, Javillonar says, “Start with local bar associations in your area, especially the specialty bar associations so you can meet lawyers from minority backgrounds. Many of the associations have mentorship programs when you’re in law school and they would be happy to talk to you as you think about a career in law. Ask questions and be prepared.”