

Experience Coupled With a Whiff of Wisdom

By Lori Craig on April 9, 2010 8:20 AM

Three experienced practitioners who work with intellectual property in international markets addressed USC Gould School of Law students on March 9.

Charles S. Barquist, a partner in the Los Angeles office of Morrison & Foerster; Michael Chang, senior counsel for Warner Bros.; and Mariana Noli, an associate with The Eclipse Group, spoke about their career paths and offered advice to a group of USC Law J.D. and international students.



Intellectual property experts Mariana Noli, Michael Chang and Charles S. Barquist

Barquist focuses on business litigation, including patents and other intellectual property, and has represented domestic and foreign companies in patent litigation.

He happened upon international intellectual property when he moved to Morrison & Foerster's Tokyo office in the early 1990s and started doing patent work. He currently focuses on patent litigation that involves Japanese and Taiwanese law.

"I think the secret to practicing international intellectual property is to not be afraid of learning the technology," Barquist said. "If you have any degree of aptitude and interest, most of us can do it."

Intellectual property law in the United States and around the world is constantly evolving, and it is nearly impossible to keep up with all the changes happening in each country, Noli said.

Her practice focuses on the preparation and enforcement of foreign and domestic trademarks. A native of Argentina licensed to practice law there and in California, Noli works mainly with companies that are expanding in Latin America.

"Know U.S. law, keep up to date with the law and you can rely on foreign associates to keep up-to-date on other jurisdictions," Noli said.

Aside from taking upper-level intellectual property courses, the speakers suggested law students join organizations that welcome student participation.

Barquist pointed to the Los Angeles Intellectual Property Law Association, the intellectual property section of the L.A. County Bar Association and the Intellectual Property Inn of Court. Such groups give students the chance to meet practicing lawyers and could lead to a job interview or offer.

Because Chang practices in such a specialized industry, he joins outside organizations that help him understand his clients in the entertainment industry.

Moot court and writing competitions are also good ways to learn different areas of intellectual property law while still in school, Noli said.

Asked to discuss their working environments, Barquist said that small firms offer advantages in the responsibilities available to associates while big firms offer a range of opportunities.

"If you seek out the opportunities that an environment like that gives you, you have the whole world open to you," said Barquist, who worked in a small firm for a few years after graduating from law school and clerking for a federal judge.

"Morrison & Foerster has a very cooperative or collaborative culture," he noted. "That kind of ability to call our resources around the world is great for our clients."

Chang worked in the small L.A. office of a New York firm following his clerkship. He said he lives for the thrill of deal-making, citing the example of what studio lawyers did in recent negotiations to acquire the movie rights to the Space Invaders video game.

“On a deal like that, being in house, it’s a pleasure to know the process from beginning to end,” Chang said. “You get to know the business and, being a part of the management team, decide the direction of the company.”

Being involved in so many different aspects of the company, Chang said he wears many hats in his job, and one of the most challenging ones to wear is that of compliance officer. For example, he’s observed instances in which movie productions had to be delayed due to legal issues that were not worked out.

Offering the boutique-firm perspective, Noli talked about her close relationship with attorneys in The Eclipse Group’s L.A. office and the accessibility of attorneys in the firm’s five other offices.

“I had a personal relationship with all of my bosses,” Noli said. “They would take time to explain things to me, which is rare in our profession. I feel fortunate that I had so many mentors.”

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