

Question & Answer

2015 graduate Ilaria shares what life is like in law school today, and as a new alumna.

With law school ending just six months ago, **Gabrielle Ilaria, BA '11 and JD '15**, has vivid feelings about it all. First, there's the elation at having survived it — "Man, was it hard," she says, despite finishing top 10 in a class of 120. Then, understandably, there's the pride in belonging to an exclusive society of sorts. "Law school is a unique thing, in that once you've been through it, now you're part of this club where it's like, 'I know exactly what you've been through; I went through that, too.'"

With so much hard work behind her, there's sheer joy about the road ahead. In November, Ilaria kicked off her career as an associate at Polsinelli's Kansas City office, building on summer internships in her 1L and 2L years. There, she'll make her way in litigation.

This is a snapshot of Ilaria's story, in her own words.

What made you decide to go to law school? "It was always in the back of my mind. But then I went to school, and I majored in psychology — and I loved psychology. I was going to grad school in psychology. That was the game plan.

"I studied abroad, and they didn't have psychology credits, so I just took these general credits. One of them was European Law. And the teacher told me, 'You should think about law school, because you're the top student in my class.'

"So when I got back, I looked into schools and took tours. It was like, 'Oh my God, I think I'm doing this!' I just did a complete one-eighty in my mind. I'm very glad I made that choice. It feels like the right fit for me."

The Polsinelli Perspective

With 240 lawyers in Kansas City alone, Polsinelli wisely matches each summer associate with two mentors. **Anthony Springfield, BA '99 and JD '02**, filled one of those roles during Gabrielle Ilaria's 1L internship. A shareholder, Springfield has been with the firm since 2002, so he knows what to look for in future colleagues.

"I think she's a dedicated worker, and very bright. I'm looking forward to her getting started," Springfield said, a few weeks before Ilaria's first day. "I think Washburn Law gives you an excellent legal education. It provides the background and the necessary skills that allow you to hit the ground running."

Why Washburn Law? "It was almost the same reason why I picked Washburn undergrad over other universities, because it had this personal feel. When you take a tour, you feel like they actually want you there, and people are going to help you.

"I didn't have one mentor; I had a lot. I had at least four professors really looking out for me — people who I could contact today and if I needed a favor, they would do it."

What's one practical lesson you learned in law school? "Washburn Law encourages collaboration. It's not this dog-eat-dog world where students are making sure other students can't succeed. Law school is naturally competitive. And I think Washburn Law tries to emphasize collaboration with tools such as the study group program, which groups about five 1Ls with an older student leader. Study group was a key part of my success and got me in a group mindset.

"That's more real-world. I'm at a firm now — you have to get along with a bunch of people who have very different personalities than you do, and were taught to do things a different way. And you have to work together to get things done. So for me, it was just more life training to think like that."

How did you land your first internship at Polsinelli?

"They interviewed me, and we just had this great conversation. We just seemed to be on the same page about our goals and how we wanted our work experience to go. It was great because getting a paid internship your 1L summer — that's basically the goal of 1L year. The fact that I got that, it was just amazing. I was on cloud nine."

How was it working with alum Anthony Springfield at your internship?

"He was the person who would take me to lunch and say, 'How's everything going? Are you getting enough assignments? Are people being receptive toward you?' And then if you had a problem, he was there to straight-talk it with you. He would be honest about what he was hearing around the firm, as far as if I was doing good work, or if I needed to change something. He was very supportive."

What drew you to Polsinelli? "I had a good experience there. They told me the good and the bad; I never felt like they were sugarcoating things. The attorneys were very honest with me about their workload. The women attorneys were very honest with me about the culture of the firm and being in the profession. I felt like I could really succeed there."

