A PRACTICAL INSIGHT ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOREIGN TRAINED LAWYERS

By **Munia El Harti Alonso** *and* **Aura Guerrero**

The event of HBA-DC's LLM Subcommittee entitled «Kick-off Event: Online Get Together» was held virtually on **Thursday, March 3rd** at **6:30 pm**. It gathered members of the HBA-DC to share their experiences as foreign-trained attorneys with a Master of Laws (LLM). The event was also the inaugural kick off of the HBA-DC LLM Subcommittee, created in January 2022 to service the professional interests and aspirations of US and foreign-trained attorneys pursuing an LL.M. in the DMV region. This new internal subcommittee allowed an exponentially significative portion of the HBA-DC membership (LLM candidates of all levels of seniority) to be represented within the organization.

The discussion was specifically aimed at dissecting and sharing pragmatic knowledge on the opportunities for Hispanic lawyers in the US pursuing an LLM and an Optional Practical Training (OPT). The panel was composed of Alejandro Guadarrama (Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP and Affiliates), Munia El Harti Alonso (Xtrategy LLP) and José Enriquez (Morrison & Foerster LLP), and moderated by Aura Guerrero (HBA-DC LLM Sub Committee Co-Chair), Carolina Gamba (HBA-DC LLM Sub Committee Co-Chair), and Maritza Perez (HBA-DC's President). Distinguished HBA-DC members also joined the online event, such as Judge Vasquez (United States Tax Court) and Sandra Chavez Bellew (Co-Chair of the HBA-DC Student Affairs Committee).

The panelists shared their experiences as foreign-trained lawyers with a Masters of Laws, directed at a large audience: foreign lawyers prospecting an LLM, JDs, and students currently in an LLM Program within the DMV and beyond.

CAREER PATH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Guadarrama opened up the panel by recalling his path at the very beginning of his career, some 20 years ago. He obtained his JD from Universidad Catolica Andres Bello in Venezuela in 1997, and his LLM from the University of Miami School of Law in 1999. Alejandro is a first-generation lawyer, now devoting significant efforts to the empowerment and employment of diverse lawyers. He participates in Skadden's Latinx Affinity Network and serves as a member of its Steering Committee, in addition to being an enthusiastic member of the HBA-DC and HNBA. In 2021, the HNBA named Mr. Guadarrama as its Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year.

Recalling the path in a legal career is one of dedication and its hurdles, he made an emphasis on the importance of mental health for attorneys. In that regard, he volunteers with the D.C. Bar's Lawyers Assistance Program, which offers confidential counseling for lawyers facing mental health challenges. In 2020, he joined the Lawyers Depression Project, a group of legal professionals working to break the stigma around attorney mental health.

CAPITALIZING ON NETWORKING: CRAFTING THE CAREER ROADMAP

Ms. El Harti Alonso, a 2020 LLM graduate from Georgetown Law, pointed out that her involvement with the HBA-DC and analogous organizations was decisive in her securing an externship at the law firm Jenner & Block and an OPT with boutique law firms Carballo Law (Miami) and Xtrategy LLP (DC), where she worked on complex cross-border disputes that necessitated a counsel with native Spanish and French. She explained how she tapped in her network of various associations to connect with hiring partners seeking a foreign attorney with disputes experience. The HBA-DC mentorship program of which she was a mentee provided her with a clear roadmap at an early stage of her LLM program thanks to her mentor Jose Arvelo (Covington), a "sounding board" in her path.

ON THE CAPACITY TO PIVOT

Mr. Enríquez, a graduate from the two-year LLM Program at Georgetown Law, completed his Externship as part of the LLM program at DLA Piper in project financing and continued to work in transactional work at Morrison and Foerster LLP. He highlighted the importance of being able to pivot and adapt, as he was initially a senior lawyer in oil and gas at the principal Nicaraguan NOC.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the panelists' interventions highlighted the importance of foreign-trained attorneys engaging with Hispanic professional organizations, creating communities with their peers, mentors and professors, and utilizing the tools offered by their schools and various professional organizations. This panel was the first of an ongoing series of events that the LLM Subcommittee has organized, focusing on opening up mentorship and guidance opportunities to, mostly, foreign-trained attorneys who come to the United States pursuing academic and professional growth, and have a unique set of skills that have proven to be essential in an array of legal efforts and initiatives in different fields.

Aura Guerrero *is a Human Rights Consultant at the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law in Washington DC. She has been appointed as an international electoral observer by the Organization of the American States in El Salvador and Colombia, and has professional experience in the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. She is an attorney in Mexico and is admitted to the New York Bar. Aura is also the Co-Chair of the HBA-DC (Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia) LLM Subcommittee.*

Munia El Harti Alonso *is a senior consultant at boutique law firm Xtrategy LLP in Washington DC specializing in international arbitration and litigation previously a delegate at the European Union Delegation to the United Nations in New York. She is an attorney admitted to the New York Bar, holds an LLM from Georgetown Law, and is currently pursuing her PhD at the Universidad de Madrid on international renewable energy disputes.*