

Julian Miller Featured in DRI Diversity Insider Newsletter - Launching a Diversity Pipeline Program

Launching a Diversity Pipeline Program

By *Julian Miller*

You may read Julian's article directly on DRI's Diversity Insider page [here](#) or text below.

When I joined Forman Watkins & Krutz LLP, as a senior associate in October 2019, I did not initially envision my existing role as the pre-law director at Tougaloo College, an historically black college in Jackson, Mississippi, would so quickly intersect with my responsibilities at the firm. As the pre-law director, I was constantly seeking opportunities for my students to gain exposure to the law and legal profession. I have always believed that exposing diverse undergrad students, many of whom would be first-generation attorneys, to the legal profession would have the immediate benefit of improving their success in law school and the long-term benefit of success as a practicing attorney.

While I knew the opportunity existed for Forman Watkins and Tougaloo to form a partnership to provide opportunities to the students, I initially thought it would take some time for me to get acclimated to the firm and to learn how such a partnership would best work. However, it did not take me long to realize that my goals for exposing my pre-law students to the legal field matched the firm's existing desire to initiate a diversity pipeline program with local, historically black colleges. I soon worked with members of Forman Watkins' Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Vernon McFarland, Erin Wedge Latuso, Malissa Wilson and Nick Giallourakis, who were discussing a pipeline program to introduce diverse students to the corporate law environment. Our existing goals to address the lag in recruitment and retention of minority attorneys and to provide learning opportunities for local students combined to form Forman Watkins' initial Diversity Pipeline Program.

The Diversity & Inclusion Committee, chaired by Caroline Upchurch, launched the FWK Diversity Pipeline Program on April 26-30, 2021, with three of my students from Tougaloo's pre-law program. The students attended seminars that provided an overview of various aspects of "firm life." The program included sessions on civil litigation and

FormanWatkins' practice areas, along with discussions regarding the FormanWatkins' Pro Bono, Recruiting, and Diversity & Inclusion committees. The students were given a legal research assignment, and each prepared a written memorandum of their findings. They were also assigned attorney mentors during the program to facilitate discussions and to help with the research assignment. The program concluded with the students accompanying me to an in-person hearing in federal court before District Court Judge Carlton Reeves, who spoke with the students at the conclusion of the hearing. The program achieved our collective goal of providing the students an up-close experience as to what life might be like as a civil litigator, to offer guidance about working in a formal law firm setting, and to form relationships that might benefit the students as they continue through law school.

Given the program's success, FormanWatkins provided additional opportunities to diverse students throughout the year by establishing a "Lunch and Learn" program and a summer pre-law "Boot Camp." The "Lunch and Learn" speaker series began on June 22 with the general counsel from Baker Hughes, Regina Jones, and Senior Litigation Counsel, Amy Blumrosen, speaking to current students and recent graduates from Tougaloo College and Jackson State University, another historically black university located in Jackson, Mississippi, about pursuing a career in the legal field. They shared their own experiences and offered advice on how to navigate law school and the legal profession with integrity and authenticity. FormanWatkins hosted the summer pre-law "Boot Camp" in July 2021 for Tougaloo and Jackson State students entering law school in the fall. The program started with an all-day orientation featuring a panel of law school summer associates clerking at Forman Watkins who gave advice and tips for success in the first year of law school. Sampada Kapoor, a Forman Watkins associate, led the Boot Camp participants in a seminar on case briefing and outlining in law school. The pre-law students also participated in a mock law school lecture conducted by Larry Pittman, a professor at the University of Mississippi School of Law. The program culminated in the students completing an intensive, three-week virtual course, taught by Sampada Kapoor and me, that covered the first-year core civil courses (torts, property, contracts, civil procedure) as well as first-year legal writing and research.

FormanWatkins plans to continue the Diversity Pipeline Program year-round and hopes to include other HBCU students across the state. The firm also hopes to expand this program to its New Orleans office, where it has been conducting programming at local law schools and recruiting at Southern University Law School for many years.

More about FormanWatkins' Diversity Pipeline Program

Program Eligibility Requirements:

- Members of a group traditionally underrepresented in law school and the legal industry
- Not currently enrolled in law school
- Currently enrolled as a junior or senior at Tougaloo College with a minimum GPA of 3.5
- A Mississippi resident preferred but not required

FormanWatkins Diversity Pipeline Program includes:

- Civil litigation legal education seminar
- Panel of attorneys to answer questions regarding life as a civil litigator
- Attorney shadowing opportunities during meetings, court appearances, and depositions
- Networking with practicing attorneys and current law students
- Stipend of a minimum of \$1,000

- Mentorship during and after the program