

IP IN BLOOM: INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY POWERED BY WOMEN

As many of you will know, the theme of the **World Intellectual Property Day** this year is **“Women and IP: Accelerating Innovation and Creativity.”** This is a fantastic topic, and I am convinced that the involvement of women in creative and innovative sectors needs to be highlighted more and definitely celebrated, so does their role in the legal IP profession. If you are a young woman and still thinking about a suitable career path, or perhaps you are already on the path of a legal qualification, but not sure yet in which area to specialise, you might be asking yourself some of these questions:

I was definitely curious about all of these questions, after my initial degree in international relations and international law and when making a decision to specialise further. Fortunately for me, I knew a few lawyers at the time, and I could ask them for some career advice. Unfortunately, however, all of them were men, and could relate only partially to some of the questions and concerns I was enquiring about.

The wonderful women I met in my first job were great legal minds that I was really inspired by, but none of them specialised in IP, the area I was most attracted to, and which, at the time, was not really that popular in my jurisdiction (the closest area to IP in my law firm was competition law and M&A where you also had some IP aspect).

Some years later, after a couple of specialised IP legal degrees in common law and civil law jurisdictions and having worked in several countries in private practice, IP related in-

house role in the sports industry and now at an association uniting IP professionals from around Europe and beyond, I would like to share with you (readers of this article, many of whom are hopefully women) that I now know the answers to these questions and that my experience has revealed that in this area of law the possibilities are truly endless.

I have asked several fantastic women coming from different countries and cultural backgrounds, working in diverse IP related roles, but who are united by the same passion for IP, to tell their stories about how they chose and navigated this dynamic environment and achieved incredible heights, what was their experience like, who or what was their inspiration, challenges they may have faced along the way, and what do we

‘How and why do women choose a career in law, particularly, in intellectual property law?’

‘Do they become successful?’

‘Is this area of law something more suitable for women?’

‘What are my options?’

‘Is it interesting and challenging enough?’

‘Will I be able to achieve a good work-life balance if I choose such a career?’

‘What shall I be prepared for, when I am starting on this path?’

‘What kind of work will I be expected to do and what kind of projects might I be involved in?’

bring to the table and what IP brings to the table for us, women.

Hopefully, you will enjoy reading about their inspiring experiences and take on the valuable advice they share below, wherever you might be in your career path at this particular moment.



**DEBBIE ROENNING,
DIRECTOR OF THE WIPO
MADRID LEGAL DIVISION
(GENEVA, SWITZERLAND)**

I am Debbie Roenning from Norway, currently working for WIPO in Switzerland. My title is Director of the Madrid Legal Division.

Please describe your path in IP. Why/how did you choose IP as your practice area?

In short, the path I have taken in IP has been inspiring, interesting, and intellectually stimulating. I fell into the field of trade marks and IP by mere luck and coincidence; I applied for a number of jobs, one of them being in the Norwegian IP Office (NIPO). NIPO asked me in for an interview, and that was it! My work at NIPO led me to WIPO, where I have been working since 2010.

What attracts you in IP?

What has kept me in IP for so many years, particularly in the trade mark field, is that it is so relatable – we are surrounded by trade marks. Every day, we make decisions, based on our presumptions, associations, and feelings, about whether to choose one brand over another – from choosing our favourite food to the car we drive and the clothes we wear. IP is creativity and innovation, and is a field that is in constant development. IP plays an important role in the biotech, fintech and media sectors – the biggest drivers of economic and business growth –

it has to move with the times and there is always something new to learn.

What does the work in your role involve? How is it related to IP? What does your typical day look like?

A typical working day involves informing and advising trade mark holders, attorneys/agents, and IP Offices about the benefits of the Madrid System and how to use it. One of my key responsibilities is to help countries interested in joining the System with their preparations for accession to and, later, the implementation of this System. Just recently, we wrapped up implementation of the Madrid System with colleagues in the IP Office of Belize. Now we are working with our newest member, Mauritius, to do the same.

I am also involved in preparing for an exciting online event for women entrepreneurs on how the Madrid System can help boost their businesses. This will take place on April 25 and is part of this year's World Intellectual Property Day (April 26) on the theme of "Women and IP: Accelerating Innovation and Creativity". Details of this event will shortly be available on WIPO's website.



Did you have any female role models in your career?

I am fortunate to come from a country where women have equal opportunities and gender equality is recognised as the norm. However, when I started out in 1993, the IP field was heavily dominated by men. While not having a woman role model per se, I have worked with and been supported and supervised by excellent women, both at NIPO and WIPO. I am happy to see more women in senior management positions, not only here at WIPO but also in IP Offices and the private sector.

I appreciate the efforts WIPO is making on gender, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

We are moving in the right direction and making some progress, although there is still so much room for improvement. We are not yet where we need to be in fully closing the gender gap. I am also glad to see more activities targeting women. This is something that we need to continue with in the years to come.

Did you face any challenges as a woman in your role/in this practice area?

I personally did not face any challenges, however, in certain countries, it is still challenging for women to be taken seriously. As a general observation, I feel women often have to work harder, and possibly smarter, to be acknowledged, listened to, and respected.

What would be your recommendations/ tips for women starting a career in IP?

First, congratulations for choosing an area where so much is happening. Gaining experience in the area of IP will open the door to many opportunities; from working in government to private practice, to a variety of interesting, fast moving, and diverse companies. It is an exciting field and by its very nature it is international, giving women more opportunity to travel and experience different cultures and countries.

First, I would recommend taking the time to explore and find your niche in a diverse yet highly specialised and evolving field of law; you could end up working for an intergovernmental agency drafting and implementing international treaties, or advising top scientists, small innovative businesses, great authors, or the owner of your preferred brand of chocolate! The opportunities are endless.

Second, work hard, stay true to your values and do not be afraid to speak up and take your well-deserved place at the table.



JUDGE VESNA TOMLJENOVIC, GENERAL COURT OF THE EU, LUXEMBOURG

My name is Vesna Tomljenović, and Croatia is my country of origin. For the last ten years, I have been living and working in Luxembourg, as a judge at the General Court of the EU.

Please describe your path in IP. Why/how did you choose IP as your practice area? What attracts you in IP?

Now, when I am approaching my retirement age, I realise that what usually happens in life is not what we have envisaged at the beginning of our career.

After a short period I had spent at the Municipal Court (Rijeka), I passed the bar exam, but then I left judiciary by choosing the academic career. I started to work as an assistant at the Faculty of Law (Rijeka University) where I gradually became a professor, working and teaching for almost 33 years. Being a professor of Private International and European Law, the focus of my research was not primarily on IP law. In fact, after my master's degree in family private international law, I decided for my PhD to explore cross-border maritime legal questions. Rijeka, a city at the North Adriatic Sea, where I come from, was maritime oriented, and thus it was somehow natural to centre my research in that domain, since my teaching and researching were closely connected to judicial practice. However,



Photo: instagram.com/peacepalace_vredespaleis

due to the war Croatia went through at the beginning of 90s, the maritime economy slowly started to decline. Consequently, I decided to change the focus of my research turning my interest to the European law. That is why some fifteen years later, when Croatia became 28th Member State of the EU in 2013, I became the judge at the General Court of the EU. Only then my fascination with IP law really started.

The IP cases form approximately a third of the cases of the General Court's portfolio. Those cases concern mostly EU trade marks, with very few design cases, although some other segments of IP law, such as a copyright or patent law, have become of utmost importance. Particularly, in the context of digital economy the protection/abuse of IP rights poses numerous legal questions, particularly when assessing the potential anti-competitive behaviour of an IP right holder. The essential change for me, concerning IP cases, was triggered by the internal reform of the General Court in 2016, when it was decided that six out of ten of the General Court's Chambers with deal with IP cases and four with civil service cases. As the President of the 7th Chamber, I chose to work with IP cases, and the same path I followed three years later (2019) when I was elected as the Preside of the 2nd Chamber. Consequently, being involved

with a great number of IP cases, I had the opportunity to become familiar with different and some very legally interesting questions of this segment of the European law.

What fascinated me in trade mark law the most is its importance for the European market itself, and its stakeholders. What makes it especially interesting for me is the way in which different cultural and traditional backgrounds of judges have to be intertwined while deciding those cases.

What does the work in your role involve? How is it related to IP? What does your typical day look like?

As a judge of the General Court of the EU, I work on cases originating from various and different segments of the EU law, like state aid, competition, public procurement, antidumping etc., and within very different legal surroundings.

When it comes to IP cases, on a daily basis I deal with the legal complexity of finding the proper balance between the legitimate protection of registered trade marks on the one side, and on the other, the prevention of the abuse of trade mark law by the proprietors of those trade marks.

As a reporting judge in an IP case, I have to prepare the preliminary report which is then presented before the Chamber. In the majority



of IP cases, the parties are requesting a hearing, which has to be justified due to the fact that the General Court is a third instance dealing with the case. Hearings could bring some additional benefit for the assessment of the disputed questions. After the oral part of the proceedings is over, I have to draft a judgment, which is later deliberated within the Chamber.

Did you face any challenges as a woman in your role/in this practice area?

Maybe because I have spent most of my professional days in the academia, I did not encounter any challenges because I am a woman. The same applies to my work at the General Court of the EU. In fact, my fellow colleagues, mostly men, have twice (in 2016 and 2019) choose me to perform the role of the President of the Chamber of five judges. However, my persistence to pursue my professional career spilled over into my private life, in particular, in relation with my daughter when she was a little girl. When I started to work on my doctoral thesis, I wanted to do my research in a good library and so I travelled to the Hague to spend six months in the Peace Palace library. At that time, my daughter was three years old. My husband and my mother took care of her, but for her my absence was unacceptable. When I phoned home and tried to speak with her, she refused my calls telling my mother that she was busy having no time to speak with me. I remember those moments as very difficult ones, because I felt guilty for prioritising my work over my daughter. The feeling never disappeared even when she grew up. Every time I had to leave home because of some research or project, I always had the same bad feeling of guilt. Nowadays, my daughter, a specialist in urgency medicine, has two beautiful children. I asked her once whether she had the same feeling of guilt when leaving her children when she had to attend a conference or training. Her answer was very simple, she told me: "I had to go!"

Balancing between profession and private life is an endeavour for every woman, notwithstanding the help she could get from the rest of the family. However, my message is that women must not blame themselves if sometimes they have to prioritise work over family, because having a successful professional career is an important part of who we are.

Did you have any female role-models in your career?

I had no female role-models in my career, but when I think over in retrospect, the woman who had a huge impact on my career was my mother. My mother was a simple woman who has worked all her life and cared for our family. She was telling me on daily basis that for a woman the most important is to be fully independent. In order to reach that stage, according to her, a woman had to have a career and to perform her job in the best possible way. My mother's mantra, which she constantly repeated to me when I was young, was that I have to learn, learn, and only learn. What I have accomplished in my professional life is the result of my mother's constant insisting on education and its importance for every woman.

What would be your recommendations for women starting a career in IP?

Since I have not started my career exclusively in the IP field, I would not be able to give some specific recommendations about what the best way would be to start a career in this respective area. However, based on my professional life experience, talking as the university professor and now the judge, I would recommend constant education and, if possible, a diversification of knowledge. Today, IP law is in a phase of adjustment to new economic and technical developments, therefore, there are lot of new areas of IP law which could be very interesting to explore.



PROF. MARIE-CHRISTINE JANSSENS, HEAD OF UNIT, KU LEUVEN CENTRE FOR IT & IP LAW (LEUVEN, BELGIUM)

My name is Marie-Christine Janssens, I am from Belgium, I am a Professor and head of CiTiP, Centre for IT & IP Law (KU Leuven), located in Leuven, Belgium.

Please describe your path in IP. Why/how did you choose IP as your practice area?

In the early days of my career I never expected to be a professor. I combined studies of history of arts and musicology (I played piano and violin) with law studies



at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven). Professional chances in the field of arts seemed slim, so when I started my master's degree in addition to courses in arts, I took on courses such as copyright and industrial property law. When my master's studies were completed (law degree Lic. Jur. in 1981

and admission to the Brussels Bar), I was lucky to immediately have been offered a job in an international Brussels based law firm which had a family law department (another area in which I was interested) and a department specialised in IP matters (copyright, trade mark and patent cases). I spent 10 years working at this firm and, interestingly, many of my IP files were related to the world-famous Belgian



comic book series “The Smurfs” by Pierre Culliford (“Peyo”), which also allowed me to spend one year in the firm’s correspondent office in Washington D.C. to handle the film industry aspects related to the comic.

During the years in private practice, my interest in IP grew and by chance I came across a vacancy announcement for a part-time research assistant in the field of IP at KU Leuven. I wanted to dive deeper into the legal issues than I could do at the firm, so I applied and was accepted for the position at the former Centre for Intellectual Property Rights (CIR) in February 1989 as an assistant to Prof. Frank Gotzen.

After I obtained a Ph.D. (in patents law) I was offered to teach IP courses and gradually grew in my role from the assistant professor to eventually becoming the full professor teaching exclusively IP courses at graduate and postgraduate level. This

was quite exceptional, but IP was becoming more important and more courses at the University were added, including for non-lawyers, allowing me to concentrate on the areas of my main interest, namely copyright and trade mark law.

Around 2014 there was a merger of CIR with the IT department ICRI, resulting in the creation of the current KU Leuven Centre for IT & IP Law (CiTiP), and of which I have been the Director ever since. This was a very important step which I advocated for, as there are many overlapping issues between these domains (think for example of data regulations, generative AI etc.).

Since 2006, I am also honoured to be President of the Belgian Council for Intellectual Property Rights, section Copyright and Neighbouring Rights (advising the Minister of Economic Affairs). In parallel, I hold other positions and responsibilities as a member of various boards, steering and executive committees, editorial boards of IP related organisations, societies, and associations.

What attracts you in IP?

My passion for IP is of course related to my interest in music and arts. If I have to compare it to family law, for example, which involves more psychological aspects than pure law, I find IP much more legally challenging with different types of work you encounter and very interesting and complicated issues e.g. European harmonisation and unification initiatives.

What does the work in your role involve? How is it related to IP? What does your typical day look like?

There is no typical day at work, every day and every week is different.

The CiTiP currently involves more than 90 researchers specialised in legal and ethical aspects of IT and IP (many of whom are women by the way), thus a lot of time is needed for various managerial

tasks, meetings of the Board of Directors, Managing Board involving post-doctorate researchers which discusses the research projects to be taken on board by the CiTiP, the faculty meetings. It is quite demanding to combine this with the normal duties expected of an academic (teaching and research) as well as some extra duties (I am also chair of the Commission on Scientific Integrity dealing with plagiarism issues, member of the faculty assessment committee which advises the academic council on appointments and of the Open Science task force at my university).

Did you face any challenges as a woman in your role/in this practice area?

It may surprise some but speaking of the academic world, I never had to struggle because of the fact that I am a woman.

The academic world in the sector of IP is completely open to women, which can be seen through the number of female members of the Board of Directors, professors, researchers, and post-doctorates that we have at CiTiP.

As a woman researcher in IP, it is totally possible to reach your goals. Of course, one has to be aware that, in general, around only 10 percent of PhD researchers will be able to grow into the level of a professor, but that is not different for men. It is true that presenting a solid track record plays a very important role here, and that there are more challenges for women compared to men to achieve this (like maternity and/or parental leave).

In my case, however, I succeeded to combine my career in IP with my family life and raising my three children. Of course, at times I had to sacrifice some family time, give up some hobbies and re-arrange work in a way to be able to complete it over weekends or evenings, e.g. if I had to take one of my kids to a doctor during the week, but I appreciated the flexibility that my law firm and the University were offering me.



Nowadays, female researchers have more opportunities with a parental leave option to manage the work-life balance and take care of their kids than it used to be at the time when my kids were little.

Did you have any female role-models in your career?

I did not really have a female role model. I always had to rely on myself, define my vision and go for my goals. If I looked up to anyone, it was other colleagues who could also combine a busy full-time job with a big family. I think as a result of this my own children view me somewhat as their example if they struggle to combine their jobs with raising their kids.

What would be your recommendations for women starting a career in IP?

These days I see more female students in my LLM courses in IP than male, so this area of law is definitely popular among women. In terms of recommendations, I think it is very important to network and talk to peers who are already in the profession and exchange experiences when you are at the beginning of your IP career and also when you are considering taking a career turn. This opens doors to other opportunities, helps you to see things differently. In my case I have never regretted moving from private practice to academia and would have repeated this decision again if I had to. In this context, it might be useful to join groups uniting women in IP as this might be helpful to broaden your network, personally, however, I did not feel I needed this on my path as I had many friends and contacts in IP I could talk to.



**CLAUDIA MARTINEZ FELIX,
DEPUTY HEAD OF UNIT,
EUROPEAN COMMISSION
(DG GROW) (BRUSSELS,
BELGIUM)¹**

I am Claudia Martinez Felix, Deputy Head of Unit in the European Commission, in DG GROW, Unit C4 “Intangible economy”. I am Spanish, from Barcelona, and have lived in Brussels, Belgium, for more than 20 years.

Please describe your path in IP. Why/how did you choose IP as your practice area? What attracts you in IP?

IP is a fascinating area and is part of the EU policies that guarantee innovation and boost competitiveness in the EU in a well-functioning single market. Before joining the IP field, two years ago, I dealt with other EU policies in the Commission, which were always related to the internal market, including the free movement of goods, as Deputy Head of Unit, services, and competition law. Those jobs all have in common the same “motto”: supporting our industry and SMEs in their business journey. I chose to work in the area of IP following a big reorganisation in the Commission. We had just adopted the IP Action Plan and there were numerous legislative deliverables in the pipeline. This made the job very exciting. Before joining the Commission in 2009, I also worked in the private sector, in a Think

Tank, supporting clients’ public affairs and communication efforts, and in the European Parliament for several years.

What does the work in your role involve? How is it related to IP? What does your typical day look like?

As Deputy Head of Unit in the Commission, my role is to lead, support, and represent, together with the Head of Unit, the work of a team of around 20 IP experts to ensure we successfully deliver on the priorities set by the Commission in the field of IP. In concrete terms, this means that with my team, we are working at full steam to modernise and complete the existing EU IP legal framework on trade marks, designs, trade secrets, geographical indications, and patents. This requires keeping an open dialogue with stakeholders and competent authorities, including with WIPO, and oversee as partner DG, the activities of the EUIPO agency, including its Observatory. There is no such “typical day” in my job, as it changes every day. I usually work very closely with my team and hierarchy, other European institutions and Member States and stakeholders’ representatives, to guarantee that the new IP legislative deliverables are fit for purpose, legally sound and efficient and effective for our industry, innovators, and SMEs. We are monitoring the transposition of the trade mark reform in Member States and successfully revising the designs legislation currently in co-decision with the European Parliament and Council. We are also working intensively with my team on rolling out a new scheme on geographical indications protection for craft and industrial products, also currently in co-decision. In addition, at a time when the unitary patent finally enters into force, we are finalising a new “patents package” which will include initiatives in the area of supplementary protection certificates (SPCs), standards essential patents (SEPs), and compulsory licensing.

¹ The text in this section expresses my own views and not the European Commission point of view.

I also lead and oversee the work on the fight against counterfeiting and on measures aiming at facilitating SMEs' access to and management of IP rights, such as the EU SME Fund, implemented by the EUIPO.

Did you have any female role-models in your career?

In my career all my direct bosses have always been men. However, in the European Commission several women are certainly role models for me, notably our President Von der Leyen, mother of seven kids, or our Director General, Kerstin Jorna. Both are determined and successful in their ambition to have a better Union but have in parallel managed to each have a large family.

My mother has also been a role model for me. With five kids, she always pursued her dream as a teacher at a University and managed to become "Catedratica" in her field of law, while keeping a close eye on all her kids. This shows that as women we don't have to choose between work and family, and we need to find the right balance, also with our partners.

Did you face any challenges as a woman in your role/in this practice area?

As a woman in my early forties, a mother of two boys, I regularly represent the Commission in the IP field before the European Institutions (European Parliament, Council, Committee of regions, etc), agencies (EUIPO), and with stakeholders and experts in the IP field, in Brussels but also often abroad. I have organised and chaired numerous workshops, and discussions with stakeholders, notably in the area of IP enforcement, and I have never faced any challenge due to my gender. As in any other demanding job, I need to be very disciplined to keep a good work-life balance. However, post-Covid teleworking conditions, have also brought some flexibilities that allow us to better adjust our working rhythms with our family duties.

What would be your recommendations for women starting a career in IP?

Just follow your dream and let yourself be ambitious about your professional and personal goals. There is only one life, so make the best out of it. IP is certainly a passionate area that can also be learnt later in your career. Hence, it is never too late to jump on this exciting boat!



**VIRGINIA MELGAR,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE 5TH
BOARD OF APPEAL, EUIPO
(ALICANTE, SPAIN)**

My name is Virginia Melgar, I was born in Uruguay but left the country at the age of seventeen to study law in France. I took the French nationality in 1981 and became a judge in 1982 after passing the national competition. I have both nationalities.

Please describe your path in IP. Why/how did you choose IP as your practice area?

I graduated in law from the University of Paris (Paris II Assas, 1981) and graduated in Criminal Sciences from the Institute of Criminology Paris (1980). My objective was clear since I was a child: I wanted to become a judge in particular in the criminal law field. I, therefore, started my judicial career as a Public Prosecutor at the Versailles Court of First Instance (1984-1986), followed by five years as Magistrate at the Ministry of Justice Criminal division (1986-1991). The competences in that ministerial post related a lot to international

penal cooperation and implied using my language skills, in particular, English, Spanish and Italian. It is, therefore, no surprise that I applied for a secondment at the European Commission Legal Services, to work in the free movement of goods team.

I realised that this was like working "in paradise" and I immediately fell in love with EU law. I had to deal with preliminary rulings involving trade marks, compulsory licenses, and designations of origin. In 1992, realising that I wanted to stay in the EU civil service, I passed a competition and decided to stay in Brussels at Directorate General Industry (DG Industry).

Another opportunity came along, when I was offered a position as a Lawyer at the Legal Service of the then OHIM (Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market) dealing with trade marks and designs in Alicante, Spain. I arrived in Alicante on the 15 December 1994, and it looked like another "paradise" to me coming from Brussels. I held this position for around 6 years and then gradually grew in this role to Deputy Director of the General Affairs and External Relations Department of OHIM (2001-2004), Examiner of trade marks at the Trade Marks Department of OHIM (2004-2006).

After Alicante came Munich, I worked there at the European Patent Office (2006-2011) as Principal Director Legal Affairs. However, my heart belongs in Alicante, so I moved back to continue my career as a Lawyer at the Cancellation and Litigation Department of OHIM (2011-2012), and then as a Lawyer at the Litigation Department of EUIPO (former OHIM) (2012-2015).

Within the EUIPO, I moved on to become the Member of the Board of Appeal (2015-2020) and currently Chairperson of the 5th Board of Appeal of EUIPO since 1 April 2020.

What attracts you in IP?

I always thought that my true passion was criminal law, until I had my first cases before the Court of Justice on the "Turron de Jijona"



and realised how rich and interesting IP truly is. Since these early days of 1992, it was clear that I would stay in this new (for me) world. Apart from copyright, I have explored the deep waters of trade marks, designs and patents and I learn every day from this always evolving area of law, no case is similar to another, and we are still developing the EU law in this field. Look at the promising legislative future on GIs and on patents!

**What does the work in your role involve?
What does your typical day look like?**

My work involves adjudicating appeals in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. I am also a mediator or reporting mediator in trade marks cases and member of the Presidium and of the Grand Board.

My work is a collective work. We decide on appeals cases, which involve decisions rendered by two other members and myself. I have to ensure the quality and consistency of our practice and apply the case law from the General Court.

There is no typical day, every day is different also because we visit many National Offices and talk with our colleagues either at National Boards of Appeal or national courts. A day may start with a deliberation on a case of bad faith, followed by the preparation of a decision as rapporteur and end with the presentation e.g. in Vilnius, Lithuania, of the latest case law to users.

Did you have any female role-models in your career?

Except for the two years at the EPO where my boss was Ms Alison Brimelow, I have never had female bosses, so no, I do not have a female role model, very often I was the only female in a management team.

Did you face any challenges as a woman in your role/in this practice area?

I have not faced any difficulties in my career in the world of IP. Nevertheless,

I did experience some issues related to opportunities in my previous career as a prosecutor, where there was no possibility for young female prosecutors to access the hierarchical posts reserved for male colleagues regardless of the content and the quality of the work involved.

In the world of IP, except for patents, many leaders around Europe are female and are absolutely top. This is a world where women can really develop to their full potential.

It was not always easy to work and balance my personal life, I just had my only son when we opened the office to the first trade marks applications, and I remember having my colleagues at home to meet my baby and tell me the incredible stories of the first applications.

Today, with the possibilities of teleworking work-life balance is much easier to achieve and female colleagues are really happy about our flexibility at work. At the moment, the EUIPO has reached its targets of having more than 50% of female employees at top managerial posts. At the Bords of Appeal we have two female chairpersons and two male.



What would be your recommendations for women starting a career in IP?

The best preparation for a good career is a solid educational background, this is the starting point. Then, work hard and keep your mind open all the time to any kind of

new challenge. Female students are the majority in this field of law, and they are very good, so the future for women is very promising in this field.



**DEBORAH A. HAMPTON,
TRADE MARK TEAM
LEADER, SENIOR TRADE
MARK & COPYRIGHT
PROGRAM MANAGER, THE
CHEMOURS COMPANY
FC, LLC, (WILMINGTON,
DELAWARE, USA)**

My name is Deborah A. Hampton, and I work at The Chemours Company in Wilmington, Delaware, United States. I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey and moved to Staten Island, New York when I was 12. As an adult, I've lived most of my life in either New Jersey or New York City ("NY"). I think of myself more as a New Yorker and for me home is NY. I was actually living in NY, a block away from Central Park before I moved to Delaware to take the position I have now with Chemours. I know that I'm home when I have a glass of tap water and a slice of pizza!

I received my undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of Cincinnati in Cincinnati, Ohio (birthplace of my Mom) and my post-graduate paralegal certificate from the ABA-approved Adelphi University Paralegal Program.

Please describe your path in IP.

While attending Adelphi University working on my post graduate Paralegal Certificate, the recruiting arm of the school sent my resume to a trade mark attorney at a small boutique IP firm. She was working on a global case concerning whether a certain term should be considered generic or not and needed a paralegal. She interviewed me for an hour and then offered me the position on the spot! It was my first position as a trade mark paralegal and the firm was Kane, Dalsimer, Kane.


My second job was an in-house position at Jordache Jeans. When working there, I realised that I enjoyed it much more than my previous job, as I had more interaction with clients (other departments of the company, including sales people, marketing and communications, finance and budget, regulatory, etc.) and more exposure to other areas of law and business, such as compliance, regulatory and others. Also, I no longer had to spend time recording billable hours. I still remember fondly working at Jordache Jeans where I had the opportunity to work on the iconic Diesel brand, still very popular today.

Since then, the bulk of my career has been in-house. I have worked in-house at a number of companies including AT&T (about a 1/3rd in the AT&T system and spin-offs), AHP (now Pfizer), Victoria's Secret and Elizabeth Arden. It was at AT&T that I met my second mentor, a patent and trade mark attorney, who provided me with a great foundation in trade marks. I joined The Chemours Company ("Chemours"), a spin-off of the chemicals wing of DuPont, in 2015. At that time, the newly created company was looking for a highly functional non-attorney to manage the trade mark portfolio, and I was recommended for this role by a friend.

Why/how did you choose IP as your practice area? What attracts you in IP?

I knew that I did not want to work in litigation but was not sure what other areas of law interested me. Getting involved in IP was truly a luck of the draw and it is the only area of law that I have ever worked in.

IP has allowed me to combine an area I love in my personal life with my professional life and that's fashion! I have always loved fashion, shopping and beauty and my work has touched all three of these areas. Plus, it is an area that is relatable to all of us.



"We need to increase the number of women, and women of colour particularly, in the legal profession and in IP"

We see signs of it everywhere and certainly in our everyday life. I cannot help but pay attention to all things IP, particularly when traveling abroad. I am intrigued by colourways, logos, slogans, and trade marks.

What does the work in your role involve? How is it related to IP? What does your typical day look like?

Like most non-attorneys, I have done a tremendous amount of work in the areas of searching, clearance, prosecution, renewals, and maintenance. This work was mostly procedural, but a very good knowledge foundation for my development and growth. As I matured in my role, I spent more time with clients on strategy, brand protection,

enforcement, and education. I have often been the bridge between the clients and legal. Both sides can be passionate and stubborn in their positions, and both are usually right. This can make compromise hard. With clients, usually my first question to them is "what are you trying to do?" or "what do you want as a final result?." If we in legal understand what they want and where they are trying to get to, then it will be easier to manage the projects.

At an in-house legal role, while we examine products through an IP lens, we have the opportunity to work with colleagues who view them from regulatory, and compliance perspectives while they are at different stages of design and production. If you take personal care range of products, for instance, you may have regulatory elements and in addition to trade marks, we may need to review the products for trade marks, trade dress, and copyright issues, etc. In fact, you can touch a lot of different elements and if you learn enough about these, you become savvy enough to timely spot an issue, raise a flag, involve a relevant colleague from another department that may not have been consulted before, but whose opinion is critical in a particular situation or moment.

A lot of my day these days is spent strategising on brand protection, policing, enforcement, strategic review, looking at the entire portfolio of that business (what new products are in the pipeline, where are they generating revenue, where are there hot spots and problems). If you can look at the business from a holistic view, you can then identify where the gaps are in your defence strategy, whether you need to do more online enforcement, more investigation, more collaboration with local lawyers in a particular region and more thinking outside of the box.



Did you have any female role-models in your career?

I was fortunate to gain a mentor at my first position and she is still my mentor and friend all these years later. At the time, she was a young associate trying to find her way and thrive, yet she took the time to mentor and guide me. While I definitely appreciated all that she did for me, I do not think I realised the significance of it at the time. I was the only African American trade mark paralegal at the firm, and I was initially placed in a horrible room with a mainframe computer! It was hot all the time and hard to breathe. She gave me the courage to fight for a better space, which turned out to be the law library where the other paralegals and law clerks sat.

Mind you, this was the early 80's when there were very few women of colour, attorney, or non-attorney, in the legal world. I remember walking into a room where an IP related round table or workshop were held and realising that I was the only woman of colour there.

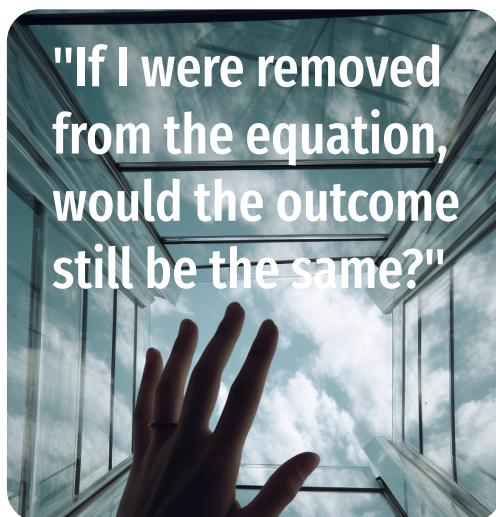
I met an African American IP attorney for the first time at an INTA conference, he was as a speaker and worked as an IP counsel of Coca-Cola at the time. Luckily, things have changed, certainly in the attorney ranks, however, recent studies show that the proportion of African Americans in the profession is still incredibly low. We must continue working hard to change this.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention my Mom, Barbara Ann, who was and will always be my role model and mentor. She worked for AT&T as a long distance telephone operator, often working holidays and weekends. Yet she was always there for me and my brother. She made me believe that I could do anything. While working for AT&T, I actually had the opportunity to do my mother's job for several weeks when the telephone operators went on strike. At that time, she was in the union and I was management, so we were called in to fill their shifts. For the first time,

I truly understood the sacrifices she made for us as that was one of the toughest jobs to do. You sit for hours without being able to get up or even use the bathroom when you want to. Breaks were short and the hours were long. All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe to her.

Did you face any challenges as a woman in your role/in this practice area?

Of course! I have two fronts that I have to manage, being a woman and a woman of colour. I constantly guard against the



stereotypes of women but also the very hurtful stereotype of being 'the angry Black Woman' or of being anti-social. Being a non-attorney adds another layer to it. Sometimes you have to ask yourself a number of questions: Am I being ignored because I am a woman? A Black woman? A non-attorney? Is this person I am dealing with is just inadequate? If I were removed from the equation, would the outcome still be the same? I do not ever want to be seen as a victim, though sometimes one does encounter an unreasonable person, other times prejudice is really there.

I made efforts in my career and managed to progress, but often I had a feeling that there was a ceiling I was trying to reach and get through. Mentors indeed helped me get

there because they did not view me with a bias. They saw that I was eager to learn, I asked a lot of questions, and they were ready to teach me. I realised that whether or not there were any barriers, it was more important whether I had the courage to ignore them and the confidence to overcome them and proceed.

I love my job and Chemours. Chemours has been voted 'a great place to work' numerous times, and there is a reason for that. The company does not tolerate bias at all and is fully supportive of all employees, it encourages mentoring and volunteering projects inside and outside of the company. Also, it truly believes in work-life balance and invests in employees being the best they can be and being their authentic selves. We have several very useful employee resource groups such as Women's Network, Black Employees Network, that I am a member of, as well as others (e.g. Early Careers Network, LGBTQA+ Network, Asian Group, etc.). In this context, the Company's goal is to fill 50% of all director level positions and above with women by 2030, and to fill 35% of all global roles with women by 2030 on the path to the full gender equality, as well as to fill 30% of all US positions with ethnically diverse employees.

There have been so many changes since I started, particularly as regards attorneys who are women of colour. But we need to increase the number of women, and women of colour particularly, in the legal profession and in IP. Currently, there is no consistency as to how trade mark paralegals are trained and this is still a struggle in non-attorney ranks, thus it is important to be getting to the schools early, so that people like me can be visible. Students can know that one could have a professionally and financially fulfilling career in IP in non-attorney positions as well.

My goal is that at some point we stop saying that someone was 'the first woman' or 'the

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first woman of colour' to do so and so, but that this just comes naturally and is actually based on the merits of how hard one has worked to get there, without being an exception. I want to do my best to reach this goal.

What would be your recommendations for women starting a career in IP?

If the name and outer packaging of the things you love spark your interest and you are drawn to them, whether it is your TV, toothpaste, or clothing, then this career may be the right fit for you. I have trained people who have gone on and excelled in IP and also met some that did not like it or were not sure. You have to love what you do, because in the end you spend more time at work than you spend with your family, so you should have fun doing what you love. I am blessed, as I love what I do, I can see the fruits of my labour and people's reaction to it.

Another recommendation I can give is to get involved with associations such as ECTA and INTA. Being active there has done wonders for my career. I have met wonderful people from all over the world, held leadership roles (I have been a member of the INTA Board twice over the past years) and learned so much from their conferences and seminars. INTA's Women's Leadership Initiative project is doing so many wonderful things right now, so opportunities for women, particularly young women, are endless. Mentors are key! You can have more than one and for different reasons. I have several and I turn to them as needed as well as them turning to me. INTA is supportive of DEI and recently completed a major study on diversity within the legal ranks of IP as a result of the Presidential Task Force led by Tiki Dare during her presidency. Finally, learn as much as you can about all the aspects of IP, try not to become stagnant in just one area. This will make for a more exciting and rewarding career.



**ANETTE RASMUSSEN,
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A/S (COPENHAGEN,
DENMARK)**

I am Anette Rasmussen, Partner, Attorney-at-law & Team Manager Legal at AWA Denmark A/S as well as managing partner of Awa Law Advokater ApS and I am also elected as Director to AWA Group's Board of directors.

Please describe your path in IP. Why/how did you choose IP as your practice area? What attracts you in IP?

I started my path in IP in Germany, where I passed the Magister Legum LL.M. at the University of Würzburg. A professor inspired me to pursue a career in IP. The international touch of IP appeals greatly to me. I enjoy meeting and working with colleagues from many countries and cultures. And I find that the IP world is both practical and business oriented and you can get fully nerdy on details, which is also kind of fun.

After Germany, my first job in IP was in Norway as an Examiner at the PTO. This

was a very good experience for me. It gave me a good basis, both in respect of IP knowledge and also good colleagues, many of whom are part of my network today. Following Norway, I returned to Denmark and went into private practice, where I have been working now for more than 20 years. I still very much enjoy the diversity of tasks and the development the IP world has undergone during those years. And I am passionate about the clients I work with – some of them for more than 20 years. I do prefer long-standing working relationships, where you as an advisor are seen as a trusted business partner. It requires good solid advice that you can stand by over the years, which appeals highly to me.

I have also been active in various IP associations and still am. I had the honour of being elected member of ECTA's Board of Directors for a six-year period including serving as President from 2020 to 2022. It was a highly interesting experience to be central at an association that seeks influence on European IP legislation and practice.

In the spring 2022, I was appointed as trade mark expert member of the Danish Board of Appeal for Patents and Trade Marks. This brings to me a new angle on case law, which I find very enjoyable.

What does the work in your role involve? How is it related to IP? What does your typical day look like?

While there is no such thing as a typical day at work, all my work relates to IP, so this is absolutely central for me. A primary task, of course, is to advise clients. I work both with strategy and prosecution as well as with enforcement and I really like following IP rights all the way. It helps knowing the entire process in detail. So, some days can be filled with practical topics in relation to prosecution. We do have export-oriented clients and good contacts





around the globe. And other days, I can be fully absorbed in writing arguments or handling tricky court proceedings. I do love that no two days are the same – and this also goes for the clients. The fact that each of them is unique with their own needs and ways, I find very appealing.

A part of advising clients is of course also to stay up to date and this can be done via work in associations like ECTA, where you can learn and build a network of good and trusted colleagues.

Being the manager of Team Legal further makes me responsible for managing colleagues and this implies holding performance review talks and so on, but also developing business. And this adds an extra layer, I find, and gives me great satisfaction if I am able to assist the development of colleagues and make them grow in their work.

Did you have any female role-models in your career?

No, not really. Though upon reflection I of course learned by observing from my mother, who was a manager within a bank. In my view, the IP world is open to women which is also reflected in many companies and these women are hopefully role models for future generations.

Did you face any challenges as a woman in your role/in this practice area?

I believe IP resembles other legal areas and I can share that I had to face questions relating to family planning when applying for jobs as a younger lawyer, it did happen – even though it was also not allowed back then. And gender gap in salary is also something I have experienced. So as a manager today, I very much do not engage in this kind of questionings and try to be as objective when assessing performance as I possibly can be. I think it has changed a lot to the better over the years, though there is still room for improvement.

What would be your recommendations for women starting a career in IP?

In general, I would say stay curious. Seek out and use the opportunities which appear along the way. Focus on building a solid basis of IP knowledge and experience and of course also on building and maintaining a good network.



As you have learnt from the above featured successful women, each of whom is a fantastic role model, IP is a welcoming legal area with so many options of what you can actually do. It is definitely not boring, as every day will be a new challenge and a new beginning, which will not look the same as the day before or the day after. It is a very dynamic and versatile sphere, with many options for narrower specialisation and there is always something new going on in IP (legislative reforms, disruptive technologies and innovations that bring new challenges, new types of rights being proposed, new directions in case law, IP protection tools and strategies and so on), so you actually never stop learning. This keeps you busy, challenged, and motivated. Thanks to its international aspect it is also easier to work in IP in different jurisdictions.

In general, women tend to thrive in this environment, given the inherent creativity, adaptability, intuition, and empathy that we have. There are of course challenges that we face as women in this profession, as in many others, however, nowadays there is much more attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion topic than ever before, some progress has been made and will hopefully be made further. Also, remote working possibilities seem to have made things easier for women, when it comes to balancing family life and our love for IP.

If I may add a piece of advice, I think one should try to experience different facets of IP, perhaps do a secondment in a law office in another jurisdiction, an LLM and a training period in another country, explore private practice, public service, academia or NGO work, dive not only into copyright, trade marks and designs, but also patents, geographical indications, AI, data aspects and any other IP area or the one adjacent to it, until you find the right fit for you and your personality.

IP IS A BLOOMING FIELD; YOU JUST NEED TO FIND YOUR FLOWER!



By Anna Ostanina,
ECTA Head of Legal Affairs,
and the wonderful ladies who have each dedicated time to work on their respective part of the article.

