

# MoFo Doubled Down on IP Summer Program

By Rebecca Cohen and Scott Graham

**S**AN FRANCISCO — When it's time to find a summer-associate job, top law students with a science or tech background can usually take their pick of elite intellectual property practices. So Morrison & Foerster implemented a unique summer opportunity a few years ago that puts associates in direct contact with top tech clients, among other perks—and it appears to be paying off.

Of Morrison & Foerster's 112 summer associates this year across all the firm's practices, 32 are PTO-qualified—they're eligible to take the exam that's required for practice before the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. That usually means at least an undergraduate degree in a "recognized technical subject" like electrical engineering or biology.

MoFo says 32 is its most ever. The firm and a few of the summers themselves say a big part of the draw is MoFo's two-summer program for intellectual property law, which is designed to provide extra training and interaction with tech



Left to right: MoFo Summer Associates Ernest Estes, Stephanie Blij and MoFo Partner Michael Ward

Jason Doiy / The Recorder

company clients. Twenty-nine of the 32 PTO-qualified students are in the two-summer program.

For Stephanie Blij, who will enter her third year at UC Hastings this fall, said the program's two-year time frame made MoFo stand out.

"It really gives you the feeling that the firm really wants you there," Blij said. "They're ready to dig in and start training you. They're not just going to run you through the mill like some random summer associate."

MoFo launched its two-summer program in 2008 with six summer associates. Originally focused on patent prosecution and strategy, the firm expanded the program in 2014 to include IP litigation. MoFo reports it has hired 53 summer associates into the program since 2008, with 46 completing both years and 44 joining the firm as permanent associates.

The program helps the firm compete for talent in a critical area: students at top law schools

with strong academic credentials in science and engineering. Electrical engineers are in especially short supply because of the attractive job opportunities in the technology sector.

“Just look to see how many engineers are in law schools. Just look at how many PhD-level life scientists are in law schools,” said Lee Anne Masetti-Martin, MoFo’s U.S. patent recruiting manager. For the blue-chip law firms, “we’re all going after the same one person.”

MoFo patent partner Michael Ward is proud of the “conversion rate” to full-time associates and the growth of the program.

“It used to be we’d go to partner meetings and they’d say, ‘How many summer associates do we have in litigation? How many in corporate?’” Ward said. Now patents are included in the breakdown. “So it’s become its own separate category.”

It’s not surprising that the supply of technically trained lawyers is constrained, said Ben Katzenellenbogen, the head of IP boutique Knobbe, Martens, Olson & Bear’s recruiting committee. “First of all, they’re really good at math,” he jokes—they see that the economics of paying for law school and being off the job market for three years can be challenging.

The market for talent right now is “extremely competitive, especially

for people from top schools with technical backgrounds, which is what we’re looking for.”

With 300-plus IP lawyers, almost all of them technically trained, Knobbe feels it has plenty to offer summer associates. Twenty-five of this year’s class of 26 summers have a science or engineering background. “Essentially all of our summer associates and attorneys are PTO-eligible,” Katzenellenbogen said.

The firm is working with law school admission departments and some undergraduate science and engineering programs to get out the word about opportunities for lawyer/engineers and lawyer/scientists.

At MoFo, Stephen Hou, who just completed his second year at New York University and is in his second summer with the firm, said he worked previously as a tech specialist at an IP boutique before starting law school. “What attracted me to MoFo is you get the best of both worlds”—the close contact with lawyers and hands-on experience that a smaller firm might provide, plus high-profile clients.

MoFo’s clients were also a draw for Ernest Estes, a rising 3L at Santa Clara who has a master’s degree in electrical engineering from Georgia Tech.

“I’m a big geek at heart, so working with top tech companies was a big thing for me,” Estes said.

According to Ward, the feeling is mutual.

The summers “speak the language,” Ward said. “The clients love it. We bring in someone from UCSF, one of the leading-edge cancer research labs, they know the technology better sometimes than the clients themselves.”

Blij, who has a doctorate in molecular, cell and developmental biology from UC Santa Cruz, was excited that her responsibilities at MoFo included keeping clients up to date on the patent fight over CRISPR, a promising DNA editing technology. It’s her second summer in the associate program, and she said her first summer went so well that she worked part-time for the firm during the school year. Knowing her way around the office already made it possible for her to do more interesting and significant work, she said.

Estes, also a returning summer associate, agreed.

“You overcome the barriers of how to interact with people,” Estes said. “We have a lot of opportunities to form bonds, both inside and outside our practice group.”

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