

# DIVERSITY at Wilson Sonsini

## Brandon J. Middleton-Pratt: Facing the Past to Forge a Better Future



Brandon Middleton-Pratt has had a few incarnations over the years: actor, professional basketball player, oilman, and attorney. Now he's an associate

based in the Austin office with a practice focused on private company representation, private equity, and

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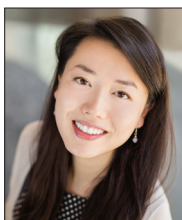
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## Meet the Women in Our Latest Partner Class, Part II



Lang  
Liu



Natalie  
Morgan



Christina  
Poulsen



Melissa  
Rick



Lori  
Will

In December 2019, 10 of the 17 Wilson Sonsini attorneys elected to the firm's partnership were women. In the second of a two-part series, we learn more about five of these highly accomplished attorneys—Lang Liu, Natalie Morgan, Christina Poulsen, Melissa Rick, and Lori Will—who come from diverse backgrounds and practice across a range of areas. Among other topics, they discuss their start in the legal profession, what brought them to Wilson Sonsini, the opportunities the firm has afforded them, what they enjoy most about their work, and their advice for junior attorneys.

Part One of this series, featuring interviews with the other women in the most recent partner class, appeared in the [March 2020 issue](#) of the *Diversity Newsletter*.



**Lang Liu**  
*Corporate, Palo Alto*  
*J.D., Yale Law School, 2011*

**How did you get started in the legal profession? Did you always know you wanted to be an attorney?**

I grew up living in China, Scotland, Germany, and the United States, and I was always fascinated by the intersection of culture, economics, and politics. I initially planned to pursue a Ph.D. in anthropology and study media and political agency. However, after getting my feet wet with fieldwork, I realized I wanted to pursue a career beyond the pages of academia and gravitated toward a career in law, as it allowed for both intellectual rigor and direct advocacy and impact.

### What brought you to Wilson Sonsini?

Many of my friends from undergrad were working in tech in the Bay Area and I was drawn to being a part of an ecosystem that was constantly changing and innovating. Once I decided to move to Silicon Valley, Wilson Sonsini immediately seemed like the best fit—the dynamic culture and environment and the incredible client base all appealed to me then, and thankfully these elements have continued to be a core part of the firm today.

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## Brandon J. Middleton-Pratt . . . *(Continued from page 1)*

mergers and acquisitions. “I enjoy doing deals and working with entrepreneurs, especially first-timers,” he says. “Plus, I like how what I do for a living makes my mom smile with pride.”

When Brandon was growing up, both of his parents were in the Air Force. “My mother was an intelligence officer and my dad was a fighter pilot who flew A-10s in Desert Storm and, later on, F-16s,” he explains. “We bounced around a lot when I was a kid, but I was OK with that. It was our normal.” They resided in a few different U.S. states, as well as in England and South Korea. “From a young age, I learned to see the U.S. from the outside looking in, which can be a valuable perspective,” he says.

During Brandon’s junior high and high school years, the family settled in San Antonio, Texas, where he played basketball. During his senior year, he was named San Antonio’s high school player of the year, and he played at the University of Denver, where he majored in finance and marketing.

After graduating in 2003, Brandon shifted gears and moved to Los Angeles to try his hand at acting. He earned parts in a few films, including *Coach Carter*, *Rebound*, and the remake of *The Longest Yard*. “I was pretty bad at acting, but I had a lot of fun,” he says with a laugh.

The following year, Brandon moved abroad again after a sports agent made him an offer he couldn’t refuse. “He’d seen a tape of me playing basketball in college and asked if I wanted to play for a team in Cyprus,” he recalls. “I love to travel, I love basketball, and I like making a little bit of money, so of course I said yes.” After a season in Cyprus, he played in Spain the next year.

Brandon was eventually lured back to San Antonio by a friend and mentor who

recruited him to the oil refining and marketing firm Tesoro (now Marathon). “He teased me that the only way to become a true Texan was to spend some time in the oil industry,” he says. “So I decided to try it.” As a senior analyst focused on corporate development, Brandon weighed in on everything from potential refinery acquisitions to refiner optimization. “I learned how to be a professional at Tesoro,” he recalls. “I

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“I chose Wilson because of the firm’s size and reputation, the sophistication of the work, and the practice breadth.”

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learned about corporate culture, and also a few important things about myself. For instance, I have a high degree of resourcefulness and grit, but limited patience.”

Before long, Brandon returned to academia. His boss at Tesoro had earned his M.B.A. at the University of Texas at San Antonio, and he encouraged Brandon to follow suit. “It’s also where my mom earned her degree, so the idea of walking in her footsteps appealed to me,” he says. With an M.B.A. under his belt, Brandon headed to Boston University in 2009 for more graduate study. “There’s a story there. It involves a girl—a girl who eventually became my wife, Lauren,” Brandon explains. Since BU was one of their top choices and since Brandon and Lauren were both accepted into programs there—Lauren to study city planning, Brandon to study law—the couple headed northeast.

### Heeding a Call to the Law

Inspired by the example of President Barack Obama, Brandon says he enrolled

in Boston University School of Law to expand both his education and his opportunities. “The legal profession offered the possibility to do important work I could be proud of, as well as the chance to take care of my family,” Brandon observes.

Brandon’s legal career began in the Boston office of Goodwin Procter, where he initially split his time between the firm’s technology practice and its private equity group. “I eventually shifted to focus on private equity, but I’ve always kept a foot in tech,” he points out. “Goodwin Procter was a good place to start my legal career. I learned a lot there, and I’ll always appreciate that—as well as the lifelong friends I made.”

With their second child on the way, Brandon and Lauren decided to move back to Texas, where both have strong family ties. After hearing good things about Wilson Sonsini from former Goodwin Procter colleagues and current Wilson partners Jennifer Fang and Melissa Rick, Brandon joined the firm’s Austin office in 2018. “I chose Wilson because of the firm’s size and reputation, the sophistication of the work, and the practice breadth,” he says.

His own practice includes private company representation, venture capital financings, and general corporate governance. He also works with entrepreneurs and start-up companies on a broad range of matters, including advising them on company formation and other issues relevant to new enterprises. “I like working with and learning from smart, dedicated people,” he says.

According to Brandon, the most challenging part of his practice is, well, how challenging it is. “Sometimes it demands so much of you and leaves little for other things,” he says. “That’s an

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## Brandon J. Middleton-Pratt . . . *(Continued from page 2)*

issue at the best of times, but it became especially challenging when the pandemic hit. In March, my mother-in-law was hospitalized for a week with COVID-19, and I lost my grandmother to old age. It was hard to concentrate and be fully present, but, thankfully, my mom-in-law has fully recovered.”

Demanding as legal work can be, Brandon has found that when times get tough, it can also be a source of solace. “With the recent focus on the pandemic and outrages like George Floyd’s killing, it’s easy to feel helpless,” he observes. “One of the ways I know to combat that feeling is to help someone. Doing pro bono work feels vitally important—especially right now. I appreciate the fact that the firm supports its attorneys’ pro bono work as staunchly as it does.”

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“When it comes to promoting diversity and racial justice, I’d prefer not to see effort; I’d like to see action. This is not so much a matter of ‘How will we do it?’ but more a matter of ‘Will we resolve to do it?’”

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He also appreciates the firm’s values when it comes to promoting racial diversity. “I think diversity is important, and I believe Wilson thinks it’s important—based both on the firm’s history and its response to the international protests for racial justice that we’ve seen these past few months,” he says.

Brandon would like to see more diversity at Wilson Sonsini, especially when it comes to firm leadership. “What the firm

has done to date in response to the global protests for justice is helpful. Financial contributions are real and always appreciated. Statements about the firm’s values should be made and are good to affirm. But that’s only the start,” he says. “Moving ahead, the firm has to mean what it has said and live out those words. There’s no other way to do that than to hire, retain, and promote more Black attorneys, especially at the partner level. The same goes for firm staff, across all levels of seniority. Given Wilson’s rich history, I have faith that it will step up and meet the moment. My hope is that we’ll be able to point to concrete progress in the coming months.”

Looking at the legal profession more broadly, Brandon says it has often come up short in its efforts to promote diversity, but he hopes that’s changing. “This doesn’t feel like a time for performative diversity or helplessness. There is no interest in hearing about pipeline issues or how hard it is to retain Black attorneys and staff. Old excuses have worn thin. When it comes to promoting diversity and racial justice, I’d prefer not to see effort; I’d like to see action. This is not so much a matter of ‘How will we do it?’ but more a matter of ‘Will we resolve to do it?’”

When asked if there’s something he wished others better understood about his own experience as a Black attorney, Brandon does not mince words. “I do not enjoy being the only one, or one of a relative few, in meetings and other professional gatherings,” he says. “Sometimes, when lost in the busyness of my practice, I can forget to be bothered by it, but I’m always aware of it. It’s an isolating and at times demoralizing dynamic to see so few peers who look like you, especially at the partner level. Any fresh reason to be reminded of it causes a wave of fatigue to

wash over me. But you have to push through it.”

Another thing he’s learned to push through is implicit bias, which Brandon points out can have an impact on a young lawyer’s career—including his own. “One of the problems with facing

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bias is that often you may not know when you are facing it,” he says, citing the example of overhearing interactions between two white attorneys, one a senior associate and the other a junior associate. “Things were being spoon-fed—things I’d spun my wheels on as I tried to learn them on my own without looking stupid. That showed me how to be a better mentee, by charging up my mentors to do more. It also made me want to be a better mentor to other associates.”

When he came on board at Wilson Sonsini, Brandon joined the firm’s African American Affinity Group. “It’s a great group for socializing and sharing,” he says. “The topics can be light, like swapping reviews on the latest HBO miniseries, or more serious, such as comparing notes on how to handle professional issues—both ones that are universal to all attorneys and staff and those that may be unique to

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## Brandon J. Middleton-Pratt . . . *(Continued from page 3)*

Black attorneys and staff. I seek out that support, and I'm glad to offer it. The group is also a channel for dialogue with firm leadership, which is valuable."

### A Watershed Moment

Brandon is cautiously hopeful that America may be coming to grips with its troubled racial history. "I think there's been a shift following George Floyd's killing and the subsequent protests demanding racial justice," he says. "What makes things feel different this time around is that more white and other Americans have joined Black Americans to decry anti-Black racism in all its disparate forms. A broad coalition is now pushing for deep, systemic change to undo the ingrained racism, in particular anti-Black racism, in every aspect of American civic and social life."

He adds, "The size and enduring strength of the current protests invigorates and reenergizes—and offers reasons for hope. To me, the question is, will a sufficient number of Americans (the vast majority of whom are white) decide that now is the time to acknowledge anti-Black racism, and all the forms in which it exists, and redress the suffering caused by it so that we, as Americans, can have closure and move forward together?"

When asked what moving forward looks like, Brandon is clear: "No other conclusion can be logically reached: if you wrong somebody, you right it. It's the only way you can truly move forward. It's the basic concept of tort law."

First, he maintains, painful truths about racial injustice, past and present, will have to be confronted. "The history of the country, when accurately told, is a brutal

history. Many of us haven't been aware of that, and that's because parts of it—for instance, the Tulsa Race Massacre—have been intentionally forgotten. But that does us a disservice. Only by squarely facing up to our country's unvarnished history can we get this moment right. And if we do get this moment right, think about how immensely redemptive that story would be."

Brandon believes that Blacks and other marginalized groups won't be the only beneficiaries if systemic racism is uprooted. "We can finally realize the full potential of our country if we can do the hard work that lies ahead," he says. "If we pull that off, then our best days lie before us. I mean that in every respect: socially, politically, economically, and individually. I'm hopeful that we as a nation can round the corner."

## David Wang Named Chief Innovation Officer



Earlier this year, David Wang was named Wilson Sonsini's chief innovation officer. In this role, David is responsible for overseeing the firm's innovation strategy and the development and implementation of legal technology programs, as well as supporting and advising both internal and client teams on the legal and operational implications of emerging technologies and business models in the legal industry.

"It is well known that the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are well represented in the legal profession, but at the same time struggle to break the 'bamboo ceiling' into managerial roles. Being given this opportunity to be on the management team made Wilson Sonsini's commitment to diversity and inclusion very real for me," David says.

David previously practiced corporate and securities law for more than 10 years, working with private and public companies on general corporate and transactional matters at both Wilson Sonsini and Davis Polk & Wardwell. He was an entrepreneur prior to becoming a lawyer. David earned his J.D. from Georgetown Law and holds a B.A. from the University of Calgary.

## Wilson Sonsini: Our Commitment to Community and Change

Following the tragic killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the ensuing worldwide protests for racial justice, we issued this public statement supporting the Black community, including our Black colleagues, clients, and friends:

*We understand that expressing our outrage and empathy in the face of these events is critically important, and that expression without action is insufficient. We also recognize that a crucial next step toward solutions is to understand the historical context of this trauma as part of a broader and continuing historical pattern for African Americans of all walks of life.*

*The awareness, unity, and collaboration coming out of these tragedies can move us forward, but we must be willing to act. Talking about race and racism can be challenging and uncomfortable. We need to educate ourselves and have difficult conversations. We are committed to creating a safe space for open dialogue to learn from each other and to challenge existing biases.*

*This is a powerful and important moment in our history. As a firm, we commit to ongoing changes that will identify and confront bias and systemic racial injustice. There is much to be done.*

To read the firm's full statement, visit <https://www.wsgr.com/en/insights/wilson-sonsini-our-commitment-to-community-and-change.html>.

### Firm Joins External Initiatives in Support of Racial Justice

We are proud to have recently become involved in two additional external initiatives to help combat racial injustice:

#### ACLU Campaign Against Racist Policing

On July 9, the ACLU of Louisiana announced that 14 law school clinics

and 34 law firms—including Wilson Sonsini—have partnered with their campaign to dismantle racially discriminatory policing practices.

The initiative, called “[Justice Lab: Putting Racist Policing on Trial](#),” aims to bring a wave of lawsuits challenging racially motivated stops, seizures, searches, false arrests, and uses of force in Louisiana. The campaign enlists for-profit law firms and law school legal clinics in bringing cases challenging racially motivated stops and seizures under the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments and any other applicable laws. By focusing these intensive efforts on a single state, the Justice Lab initiative aims to establish a litigation blueprint for altering police conduct across the country.

“Wilson Sonsini is deeply committed to aiding in efforts aimed at achieving racial justice across the country,” said Wilson Sonsini Pro Bono Counsel and Litigation Counsel Luke Liss. “We are energized to join the ACLU of Louisiana’s Justice Lab project.”

For more information, visit <https://www.laaclu.org/en/press-releases/leading-law-school-clinics-law-firms-join-aclu-louisiana-litigation-campaign-against>.

#### Law Firm Antiracism Alliance



We recently signed on to the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance (LFAA), a national collaborative of more than 125 law firms that aims to “leverage the resources of the private bar in partnership with legal services organizations to amplify the voices of communities and individuals

oppressed by racism, to better use the law as a vehicle for change that benefits communities of color, and to promote racial equity in the law and in government institutions.”

The LFAA will facilitate the coordination of its member firms in undertaking large-scale pro bono projects that are both immediate and long term in scope. Member firms will dedicate substantial pro bono resources to initiatives that address systemic racism, and acknowledge their responsibility to increase diversity, equitable access to opportunities, and inclusion of people of color within their ranks. In conjunction with the LFAA’s pro bono efforts, the leaders of LFAA law firms commit to examining and eliminating internal policies and practices that may perpetuate racial inequities within law firm structures.

To read the LFAA’s charter, visit <https://www.wsgr.com/images/content/2/8/28305/LFAA-Charter.pdf>.

### Wilson Sonsini Launches Internal Initiatives Related to Civil Rights and Racial Equality

In addition to our recently concluded matching-funds campaign supporting racial justice (detailed on p. 6), we have announced three new initiatives to provide support and increase awareness around issues related to civil rights and the push for racial equality:

#### The Harry Bremond Award

Commencing in 2021, the firm will present a new pro bono award named after retired partner Harry Bremond, who has for decades been actively involved in civil rights and in helping to ensure equal access to justice. Each year, this special award will recognize one Wilson Sonsini attorney for outstanding

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## Wilson Sonsini: Our Commitment to Community and Change *(Continued from page 5)*

work on racial justice and/or civil rights matters. Specifically, the Harry Bremond Award will recognize an attorney who has consistently upheld Harry's excellence in character, leadership, and service to community, with a focus on racial justice and civil rights matters.

### **Juneteenth**

This year, we observed Juneteenth—the oldest nationally celebrated

commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States—as a firm holiday and day of reflection. Next year, we plan to celebrate Juneteenth with a firmwide day of service. Attorneys and staff will receive volunteer time off to participate in community service projects focused on racial justice and civil rights near each of our offices.

### **Pledge for Racial Justice/Civil Rights Pro Bono Legal Services**

The firm is pledging a \$15 million increase in the value of pro bono legal services specifically dedicated to racial justice and civil rights work. The increase will be spread over the next three years (\$5 million per year) and will be measured over the average dollar amount value of pro bono services recorded for the last three years.

## Wilson Sonsini Foundation and Firm Employees Raise Over \$500K to Support Racial Justice

The firm recently held a successful fundraising campaign through which the Wilson Sonsini Foundation and hundreds of the firm's attorneys and staff contributed over half a million dollars—\$510,845—in support of three respected nonprofit organizations focused on racial justice and the fight against discrimination: the Equal Justice Initiative, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. In keeping with the firm's longstanding commitment to assisting communities in times of crisis, the Wilson Sonsini Foundation matched all employee donations to the three organizations as part of a campaign that ran from June 5 through August 10.

The Wilson Sonsini Foundation is strongly committed to ensuring access to justice. Established in 1990 and funded by donations from the members of Wilson Sonsini, the Foundation has a long history of supporting nonprofit organizations that are seeking to advance justice and civil rights. In 2020 alone, it has made donations and pledges of over \$760,000 to such nonprofits (excluding this latest fundraising campaign for racial justice).

**Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)** – Founded in 1989 by Bryan Stevenson, a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer, EJI is committed to “ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society.” EJI, which works with communities that have been marginalized by poverty and discouraged by unequal treatment, provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons. EJI's three areas of focus are criminal justice reform, racial justice, and public education.

**Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area (LCCR)** – Founded in 1968, LCCR believes that “everyone—regardless of race, class or legal status—deserves equal treatment under the law.” Working to protect and promote the rights of people of color, immigrants, and low-income people in California, LCCR focuses on racial justice, immigrant justice, and economic justice through direct services, impact litigation, and policy advocacy. Wilson Sonsini has a long history of supporting LCCR. Retired partner Harry Bremond is among LCCR's founders, and current partner Steven Guggenheim recently served as the chairman of LCCR's board.

**NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF)** – Established in 1940 under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall, LDF is dedicated to achieving racial justice, equality, and an inclusive society. LDF “pursues racial justice to move our nation toward a society that fulfills the promise of equality for all Americans.” In addition to working through the courts, LDF's strategies include advocacy, educational outreach, legislation monitoring, coalition building, policy research, and providing scholarships for exceptional African American students.

## Firm Launches Diversity and Inclusion Committee

In the spring of 2020, Wilson Sonsini launched a Diversity and Inclusion Committee (DAIC) to promote diversity and inclusion across the firm and ensure a welcoming environment where everyone is valued, included, and empowered to do their best work.

The committee, which meets approximately quarterly, oversees the firm's diversity and inclusion strategy in collaboration with firm management and the board of directors. The group also provides feedback and recommendations on new initiatives and marketplace changes.

Further, the committee advises on policies, resources, and programs to:

- Recruit, hire, and retain a diverse workforce
- Enhance awareness across the firm of diversity and inclusion initiatives and challenges
- Encourage and reward inclusive leadership behaviors
- Collaborate with clients on diversity and inclusion initiatives
- Create an environment with equal access to professional growth and advancement

The DAIC collaborates on initiatives with the Culture Committee, the Associates Committee, Affinity Groups, the Professional Development and Attorney Recruiting departments, and other committees and groups across the firm.

At the committee's inaugural meeting, each member shared why diversity and inclusion are important to them. We look forward to sharing these stories with you over the coming months.

### Corporate



**Jennifer Fang** (co-chair)  
Partner  
Boston



**Jill Fulwiler**  
Associate  
Seattle



**James Griffin-Stanco**  
Associate  
Wilmington



**Kathy Ku**  
Partner  
Los Angeles



**Randy Lewis**  
Partner  
San Francisco



**Nikkisha Smith**  
Associate  
Washington, D.C.



**Scott Zimmermann**  
Partner  
San Francisco

### Litigation



**Jamie Otto**  
Associate  
Palo Alto



**Rico Rosales**  
Partner  
Palo Alto



**Lucy Yen**  
Partner  
New York

### Patents and Innovations



**Samir Elamrani** (co-chair)  
Partner  
San Diego

### Regulatory and Compliance



**Beth George** (co-chair)  
Partner  
San Francisco



**Jamillia Ferris**  
Partner  
Washington, D.C.

### Technology Transactions



**Gary Greenstein**  
Partner  
Washington, D.C.



**Manja Sachet**  
Partner  
Seattle

### Management



**Chris Boyd**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Palo Alto



**Doug Clark**  
Managing Partner  
Palo Alto



**Katie Martin**  
Chair of the Board  
Palo Alto

### Administration



**Allison Blixt**  
Director, Professional Development,  
Diversity and Inclusion  
New York



**Jullia Carretta**  
Professional Development and  
Diversity Manager  
Palo Alto

## Spotlight on Samir Elamrani, Diversity and Inclusion Committee Co-chair



“We were born the same year, the firm and I, so we have a very good connection,” quips Dr. Samir Elamrani, a Wilson

Sonsini patents and innovation partner and department leader based in the San Diego office. Like the firm, Samir was born in 1961—but a long way from Silicon Valley. “I was born in Meknes, Morocco, one of what’s called the ‘four imperial capitals’ of the country. But growing up, I spent much of my time in Rabat, the current capital, where I went through most of my education,” he recalls.

### Samir’s Career Path

From an early age, science was at the core of Samir’s interests, which also include philosophy and literature. “Chemistry seems to bring a lot of things together, and I was exposed to it through my four cousins, who all have doctorates in the subject,” he says, noting that throughout history, “there was a lot of productivity from Muslim scientists in chemical sciences and the arts, and many of them established solid foundations.”

Samir, who is trilingual—fluent in English, French, and Arabic—initially studied chemistry at Université Mohammed V Rabat in Morocco, then went on to earn his first doctorate in chemistry from the Université Claude Bernard in Lyon, France.

In 1990, Samir moved to Texas, where he earned his second doctorate in chemistry from the University of Houston’s Institute of Molecular Design. “Two

Ph.D.s seem exotic now, and I could have come to the United States as a post-doc researcher, and not have gone through another Ph.D. program. But I always wanted to go to college in America,” he says.

After conducting research at top American and European academic institutions, Samir decided to go to law school, which ultimately led him to transition to a career in patent law. “I was in search of something that would keep me anchored in science, but allow me to do other things related to business,” he recalls. “When I realized that in the United States I could go to law school and actually leverage my scientific background and degrees into my practice of law, that was a fantastic ‘a-ha’ moment for me.”

While attending law school in the evenings, Samir worked as a full-time patent law clerk and patent agent at Burns Doane Swecker & Mathis, a boutique intellectual property firm.

“Patent law brings together science, law, and business, and we go deep into the technology of the clients,” Samir explains. “A lot of the companies we work with start out with science that comes out of university labs, and they choose to translate it into a technology through a license to the company, then the company builds its own IP. But there’s always a very scientific base.”

After receiving his J.D. from the University of Houston Law Center in 1999, he spent two years at Burns Doane Swecker & Mathis in the Washington, D.C., area. He was then a senior associate at Pillsbury Winthrop LLP and counsel at Crowell & Moring, advising clients in the biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and chemical industries.

“I had a mixed practice with both emerging companies and large companies, and I liked the emerging companies practice more,” he says. “I had the good fortune to be involved with some major emerging clients in California, and ultimately I felt that California was a better market for me.”

Samir made the decision to head west and joined Wilson Sonsini’s San Diego office in 2004. “This is the *original* law firm working with life sciences technology,” he says. “That’s what brought me to the firm: the different types of clients and the type of work we do. But there was a stronger motivation for me, based on the kind of firm Wilson Sonsini is: the emphasis on people, collegiality, opportunity, and entrepreneurship. People here reached out to me and got me involved in transactions from day one.”

Today, Samir—who became a partner at the firm in 2012—advises biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and nanotechnology companies on all aspects of patent law and related business matters. He provides patent counsel to a variety of clients, including start-up and established biotechnology corporations, multinational pharmaceutical corporations, and premier research universities.

In addition to maintaining a successful patent practice, Samir serves as the leader of the firm’s patents and innovations department, comprising 180 professionals, half of whom are lawyers and the other half patent agents, most with Ph.D. degrees in the life sciences. The department has experienced extraordinary growth over the past several years. As Samir notes proudly, “In record time, Wilson Sonsini grew a patent group largely focused on life

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## Spotlight on Samir Elamrani . . . *(Continued from page 8)*

sciences from maybe a dozen people in 2003 to the largest life sciences patent practice pretty much anywhere today. That's unprecedented. It becomes even more important given our client base of more than 1,000 companies, all of them active in various fields of applied science. Our patent team is by far the leader in representing companies in genomics, diagnostics, vaccines, and therapeutics."

Working in the patent department presents its challenges, too. Samir adds, "We're in an entrepreneurial environment and we all feel the excitement and joy when companies are started. But several of them will hit a rough patch from a financing standpoint. In the patent group, we have to find ways to continue to service the company when it needs time to get back on track. It becomes very painful and personal, because the founders are investing their own resources. That is by far the toughest part of our practice. We have to try to stay with them through the hard times."

### **The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion**

Much as the ups and downs of entrepreneurial founders are experienced on a very personal level, the notion of diversity and inclusion is deeply personal for Samir, and not only because of his ethnic background. As he explains, "I was hit by the polio virus at the age of three or four months. At the time, polio was on its way out, but in Morocco, the vaccine came a bit later, when I was six months old. Unfortunately, I was in the rare group that got it too early, which resulted in my left leg becoming paralyzed. I have been on crutches all my life."

According to Samir, the importance of diversity at Wilson Sonsini is "paramount, because we work with diverse, science-based, and technology-

heavy companies, and our firm should reflect the diversity of our clients. Just as tech companies naturally bring in diverse elements and collaborators, our firm does as well. This collaboration, entrepreneurship, and diversity—all these things are fundamental to our success."

Samir was recently named a co-chair of Wilson Sonsini's new Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which is tasked with promoting diversity and inclusion across the firm and ensuring a welcoming environment where all employees are valued, included, and empowered to do their best work. It's a position he is honored to take on.

"We're really at the forefront of diversity in the legal business at all levels," he explains. "A lot of what has transpired at the firm from an attorney diversity standpoint happened naturally and came out of the blueprint of the firm, the DNA of the firm, from the client space and the way we work. The firm wants to take it to the next level and put even more organization and deliberate effort around it, and that's where this committee comes in."

Samir continues, "We are already doing well as it relates to diversity, but we need to do better—for example, when it comes to the recruiting, retention, and promotion of diverse talent within the firm, at all levels. All types of diversity are important to creating an inclusive community. It's already very hard to recruit from certain underrepresented communities within the legal industry. We've always put a premium on human relationships within the firm and on growing people's careers, just as we help grow clients and foster entrepreneurship."

Bearing in mind Wilson Sonsini's emphasis on cultivating human relationships, Samir offers this advice to young attorneys who are new

to the firm: "Take advantage of the opportunities the firm provides to young lawyers. Work closely with your clients, embrace opportunities to grow your practice, and learn on a daily basis. Take the time to establish relationships with your clients. You will be amazed at how much growth you'll accomplish after six months, a year, or two years, and that growth continues. It's that growth that makes you the lawyer of the future that you want to be."

Outside of work, Samir enjoys spending time with his family, including his wife and three teenage children, ages 19, 18, and almost 14. "We're five strong-willed people living in one house, and my young adults find it very challenging. I can totally sympathize with them," he says. In his spare time, Samir finds himself drawn to his native Moroccan culture. "For leisure, I listen to a lot of Moroccan music and I read a lot of books from that part of the world. And I also do a lot of Moroccan cooking, when my wife allows me in the kitchen." He recalls hosting a cooking lesson for San Diego office employees a few years ago, a fun event from which all proceeds went to local families in need during the winter holidays.

Based on Samir's experience with how Wilson Sonsini has approached and overcome other challenges, he is optimistic that the firm will prevail over the current COVID-19 crisis. "There will probably be a need for multiple variations of vaccines," he says. "It depends not only on the strain, but also the recipient—the diversity of the population is a factor, and we've seen the unequal impact of this virus worldwide. But in response, our firm made the right decisions at the right moments. This is a firm that's focused on people and their well-being, and that was clear in its handling of this crisis. When we emerge again, we will be stronger. There's no question about it."

## Q&A with HR Manager Patrice Martin

Though relatively new to Wilson Sonsini's Washington, D.C., office, HR manager Patrice Martin is a legal industry veteran with more than 15 years of experience at prominent U.S. law firms. After graduating from Lincoln University, the nation's first degree-granting Historically Black College and University, she began her career as a legal secretary at Dewey & LeBoeuf in New York and then was promoted to diversity and support services coordinator. After more than seven years at Dewey & LeBoeuf, Patrice transitioned to WilmerHale's New York office, where she served as a secretarial coordinator and supervisor, and later as an HR generalist. During this time, she earned her M.A. in human resources management from New York University.

Patrice joined Wilson Sonsini in 2018 as the New York office manager before relocating to the D.C. area earlier this year to become the HR manager for the broader East Coast and Austin offices. She is also a new mom, as she and her husband, Shannon, welcomed son Ty in August 2019.

Patrice recently spoke with us about her career path, her involvement in Wilson Sonsini's African American Affinity Group, her experience as a Black woman in the legal industry, and her advice for allies, among other topics.

### **Tell us a little about your background. How did you end up at Wilson Sonsini?**

It's a funny story. I started my legal career at Dewey & LeBoeuf, but the firm went through a huge economic downfall and went bankrupt. During the downfall, they had headhunters come onsite to try to help people find jobs, because it was inevitable that we weren't going to be working there much longer. At the time, there was one recruiter who left an impression on me. She tried to

find me a job, but I ended up finding my own opportunity at WilmerHale. Fast-forward several years, and the same recruiter got in touch and presented the opportunity to work at Wilson Sonsini as the office manager in New York.

I was very impressed by the firm's culture and the unique work that they do, which was evident in the interview process. It was kind of a no-brainer. The office manager role combined a lot of my previous law firm experience into one position, as well as some new responsibilities. I thought the firm would be a great fit, and still feel the same today.

### **You recently transitioned from being the New York office manager to becoming an HR manager, and relocated from the NY office to the D.C. office. What brought about those changes and how would you compare the two experiences?**

When I returned from maternity leave in January, my director at the time mentioned that an HR manager role was open. I wasn't necessarily looking to make any big changes—I'd just had a baby—but I looked into the role and it sounded amazing. At the same time, it meant my husband and I would have to pack up our newborn and move to D.C. Surprisingly, my husband was all for it—in fact, D.C. was where we'd gone on our babymoon before our son was born, so it was always on our list of cities to potentially settle down in. We ended up moving to Maryland at the end of March—in the middle of the pandemic—so I could start this new job. Actually, our lease was up in March, so it all kind of fell into place in some cosmic way.

Since we moved during the pandemic, I haven't actually been in the D.C. office yet. All of my communications with D.C. colleagues have been over video, phone,



and email. I never imagined that I'd start the role this way, but it's been going well and I'm happy I made the decision to accept it.

In terms of comparing the two positions, the office manager role was great for learning about the firm, because I was involved in so many different functions related to how the office operates—it's very intricate. In my HR role, I have a much wider lens; it's more about the firm as a whole and our goals, and aligning those goals with the needs of our employees. One of my responsibilities is to focus on the East Coast offices more broadly, as well as the Austin office, because the rest of the HR team is currently on the West Coast. Also, HR is governed by the law, so when you're trying to understand the laws that govern employment in several offices, it's a lot to keep up with. It's a unique position, and I really enjoy being a resource to my colleagues.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you find most challenging?**

Oddly enough, what I enjoy the most is also what I find the most challenging, and that's because the world of HR is ever-changing and so much of what we do is directly affected by what's going on

*Continued on page 11...*

## Q&A with HR Manager Patrice Martin *(Continued from page 10)*

around us. It's exciting, because there's always something new to learn, but that also means I constantly need to be aware of what's changing. That's the challenge, but I love that particular challenge. It definitely keeps the job interesting.

I also get to meet new people across the firm and develop relationships with them. I appreciate that my colleagues open up to me a bit more in this role. I enjoy assisting where I can to help make work better for people.

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"There's certainly work to be done in the diversity space ... I'm proud to be a part of that change and I'm proud to be part of a firm that recognizes that need and is entrusting me to help guide the conversation."

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**You recently were named as a lead for the firm's African American Affinity Group. Could you talk a bit about what that role entails?**

It's a new role, so a lot of the responsibilities are being molded depending on what the needs are and what people really want. There's no bulleted list of responsibilities, but what I talked to the Diversity and Inclusion team about is really being a resource to Black employees at the firm. Part of the role is being available in our meetings; helping to direct meaningful and engaging conversation about subjects that, quite frankly, can be uncomfortable; helping to create that safe space where people can feel comfortable about expressing how they truly feel; and helping to effect change

where I can, as well as reaching out to allies who can effect change.

I've had some follow-up calls with people after our affinity group meetings that were interesting; I'm learning more about people and their viewpoints, and it's also helping me challenge some of my own viewpoints. It's an important role and one that I don't take lightly. I'm excited about all that's to come, because there's certainly work to be done in the diversity space, not just here but in the legal industry as a whole. I'm proud to be a part of that change and I'm proud to be a part of a firm that recognizes that need and is entrusting me to help guide the conversation.

**What efforts would you like to see the firm undertake to effect change for our African American employees?**

I think recruiting efforts, both on the attorney side and on the staff side, would be a start. It's something I've heard from other Black employees as well. Creating a more diverse pipeline and relationships is paramount, because that's how you organically start to effect change. And that takes time. It takes challenging our own unconscious bias and being open to listening and having conversations that can sometimes be uncomfortable. Allison [Blixt, the firm's director of professional development] encouraged us to talk to people we haven't talked to before, to challenge our own thought processes, to ask ourselves questions such as, who do you email versus who do you have in-person or video meetings with? Are there differences between those people? If so, why? Just challenging your mindset and not being afraid to do so.

I was watching an interview on TV and one of the presenters said, "I know these conversations about race can be uncomfortable, but you know

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"Creating a more diverse pipeline and relationships is paramount, because that's how you organically start to effect change. And that takes time. It takes challenging our own unconscious bias and being open to listening and having conversations that can sometimes be uncomfortable."

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what happens when you have those conversations? You adjust. It's just like sitting in an uncomfortable chair. You don't just sit there, you adjust." I think there's an adjustment that needs to be made, and people need to be open to that adjustment on both sides—diverse employees need to be open to possible questions that allies may have, and vice versa.

**If there was something you wished people better understood about your experience of being a diverse woman working in the legal field, what would it be?**

I first want to say that I cannot speak for all diverse women in the legal field, so I will address this through my own experience only. There are stereotypes out there about women. There are also stereotypes out there about Black people. And as a Black woman, I am subjected to being judged by both. I invest a great deal of thought into the way in which I present myself, the way that I dress, even the way that I wear my hair. Whether that's how it should be, I don't know, but there's a lot of pressure to represent well, not only Black people, but also

*Continued on page 12...*

## Q&A with HR Manager Patrice Martin *(Continued from page 11)*

“We are carrying a weight to ensure we represent our people well, to make sure we’re heard, to make sure we never once confirm by our actions or speech that any stereotype or misconception about Black people or Black women is true.”

Black professionals and Black women. We all experience different challenges, particularly in corporate America, where we are not as well represented, especially in management or leadership positions, so when one of us is put in that position, we carry a weight. It’s an invisible weight, because I, and I’m sure a lot of other Black women in corporate America, engage with colleagues and smile, and we’re professional, but we are carrying a weight to ensure we represent our people well, to make sure we’re heard, to make sure we never once confirm by our actions or speech that any stereotype or misconception about Black people or Black women is true.

But I have to say that it’s an honor, too. In my personal life, as well as in previous jobs, I’ve had conversations with other diverse women—and men—about simple things that I may have said or done that inspired them or made them think differently. So, there’s a weight, but it’s also a good opportunity. I feel a responsibility to reach out and make sure others within the Black community have the same opportunities that I worked hard to achieve.

### **What advice would you offer to allies who want to support and be involved in Affinity Group calls and activities?**

The most important thing is to listen. I think a lot of allies are used to being heard, but on the flip side, there are diverse employees who are not used to being heard. Listening is important, but not only listening—it’s important to also take action. This year, the firm celebrated Juneteenth and has been making an effort to recognize its own biases and really push the needle on effecting change in terms of racial injustice outside of the firm and looking at what work has to be done within the firm. But there needs to be a plan, and we have to be willing to work together. No ally can just speak on another employee’s behalf,

so that’s why it’s important to listen. In short, listening is the priority, followed by action.

### **What’s one thing people might be surprised to learn about you?**

I’m one of eight siblings. We’re like the Black Brady Bunch. All of my siblings and my mom and dad live in Georgia—I’m the only one who lives elsewhere.

Another random fact is that most of us are in the legal field. I have no idea how that happened. In our family, we have paralegals, intake specialists, and others in office management. I have a sister at Seyfarth Shaw and a brother at The Cochran Firm. My mom has worked at several law firms—she started out working the night shift as a document processor, worked her way up to managing full offices, and is now in-house at Delta, managing their legal department. She’s a huge inspiration to me, especially as a Black woman in corporate America, and the biggest influence in my life for sure, so she might be why I entered the field. But I’m pretty sure that everyone else just kind of found themselves in the legal industry. So actually, we’re like the legal Black Brady Bunch!

## Coming Soon: Women’s Leadership Summit

The firm will host a virtual Women’s Leadership Summit in December, rather than hold an in-person event in Menlo Park as originally planned. More details will be available shortly.

Wilson Sonsini’s Leadership Summit brings together women attorneys from across the firm to build their leadership, mentoring, and relationship skills and to encourage them to think about the best strategies to grow and enhance their careers. Our 2018 Women’s Leadership Academy was attended by more than 200 women attorneys firmwide.

We look forward to holding another successful event this December.

## Affinity Groups Hold Virtual Meetings, Connect with Summer Associates

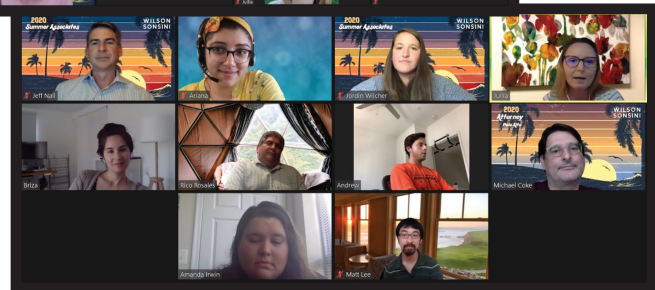
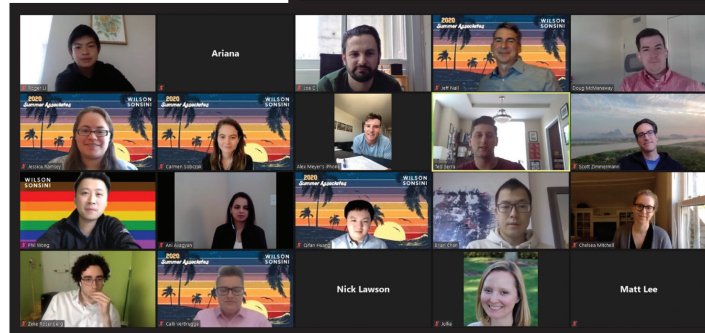
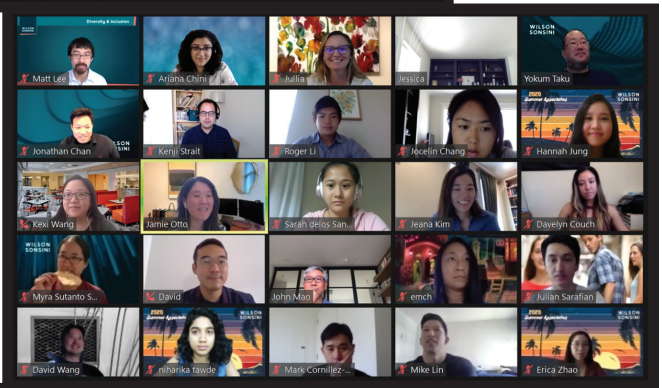
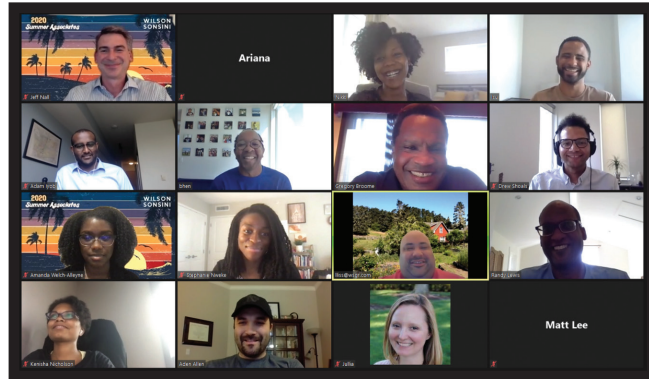
Our Affinity Groups (African American, Asian American, Latinx, LGBTQ+, and Women’s Initiative Task Force) provide opportunities for diverse attorneys and staff to connect across offices, build relationships, access mentors, and become more involved and visible at the firm. They also help to foster professional development. Allies are welcome in Affinity Groups to listen, better understand others, and show support.

In response to shelter-in-place, the Affinity Groups have hosted multiple virtual meetings over the past few months.

The African American Affinity Group gathered in early June for a supportive call to connect and discuss national events and protests surrounding police violence against Black communities. The meeting provided a meaningful reminder of the ways Affinity Groups continue to grow within the firm to meet the needs of diverse communities.

We virtually welcomed a diverse summer associate class of 78 in June. About half of them were women, 27 percent racial/ethnic minorities, and 12 percent LGBTQ+. The Affinity Groups were excited to host virtual calls to welcome the summers to the firm and provide them with opportunities to connect with attorneys of similar identities. Many interesting and funny facts about our attorneys and summer associates surfaced, and we look forward to a card tournament in the future! Stay tuned for new Affinity Groups launching soon.

If you are interested in joining an Affinity Group, please contact [Jullia Carretta](#).



## Wilson Sonsini Affinity Group Contacts

### African American Affinity Group



**Greg Broome**  
Partner  
San Francisco



**Randy Lewis**  
Partner  
San Francisco



**Luke Liss**  
Of Counsel and  
Pro Bono Counsel  
Palo Alto



**Patrice Martin**  
Human Resources Manager  
Washington, D.C.



**Nikkisha Smith**  
Associate  
Washington, D.C.

### Asian American Affinity Group



**John Mao**  
Partner  
San Francisco



**Jamie Otto**  
Associate  
Palo Alto

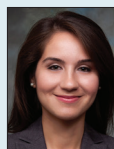


**Yokum Taku**  
Partner  
Palo Alto

### Latinx Affinity Group



**Michael Coke**  
Partner  
Palo Alto

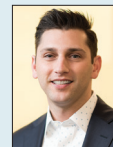


**Briza Sanchez**  
Associate  
Palo Alto

### LGBTQ+ Affinity Group



**Alex Meyer**  
Associate  
Palo Alto



**Ted Serra**  
Associate  
Washington, D.C.



**Scott Zimmermann**  
Partner  
San Francisco

### Women's Initiative Task Force



**Jill Fulwiler**  
Associate  
Seattle



**Rosalind Schonwald**  
Associate  
Palo Alto

Please contact any of the individuals listed above for further details regarding a specific Affinity Group.

## Diversity at Wilson Sonsini

The firm is committed to the principle that diversity is a core component of a thriving organization. Internally, we incorporate diversity considerations into all talent management practices, including recruiting, hiring, reviews, partner promotions, and retention. Externally, we collaborate with law schools and on-campus groups to build a strong pipeline of diverse recruits, and we regularly partner with community organizations that promote diversity.

Through these efforts, we have built a culture in which employees of all backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences are encouraged and empowered to achieve their maximum potential.

### Leadership

Diversity at the firm is not just about numbers; it's about leadership. Diverse partners—which we define to include ethnic minority, women, and LGBTQ+ professionals—hold prominent roles at all levels of management, including:

- Board of Directors
- Career Development Committee
- Culture Committee
- Department and Practice Group Leaders
- Diversity and Inclusion Committee
- Hiring Committee
- New Partner Nominating Committee
- Partner Compensation Committee
- Practice Technology Committee
- Recruiting Committee
- Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation's Board of Trustees

The firm's board chair, Katie Martin, is a woman, and diverse partners hold chair positions on nearly every standing committee of the firm. At the associate

level, two of the three co-chairs of the Associates Committee are women, and numerous committee members are diverse.

### Attorney Diversity

Retention, career development, and promotion are key components of our diversity strategy. We track the diversity of attorneys in the nominations pipeline and those promoted to partner to ensure opportunities for diverse attorneys. Consider the following:

- In 2020, 59 percent of the attorneys promoted to partner were diverse.
- Currently, 37 percent of our partners and 65 percent of our associates are diverse.

We have long been recognized as an industry leader in law firm diversity. Nationally, we continue to be ranked among the top law firms in the U.S. for diversity, having received several recent accolades from third-party sources, including:

- In August 2020, Wilson Sonsini once again was **recognized as the most diverse law firm in the country by Law360**, ranking No. 1 overall among firms with more than 600 attorneys in the publication's annual

**Diversity Snapshot.** According to *Law360*, the firm had the highest percentage of equity partners of color (18.6 percent) and the second-highest percentage of attorneys of color (29 percent).

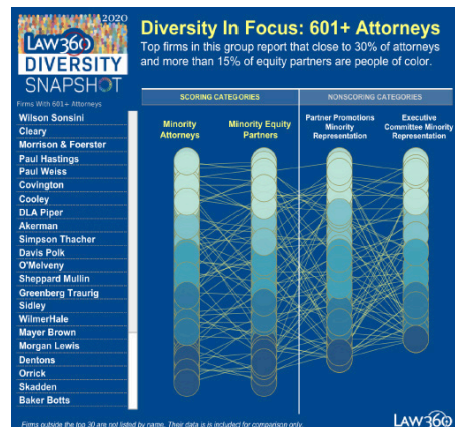
- In June 2020, Wilson Sonsini was recognized among the most diverse law firms in the United States in *The American Lawyer's 2020 Diversity Scorecard*. One of the best-known benchmarks measuring law firm diversity, the Diversity Scorecard annually ranks law firms based on the average number of full-time-equivalent diverse attorneys at AmLaw 200 and NLJ 250 law firms.



### THE TEN TOP-RANKED FIRMS

2020 DIVERSITY RANK	2019 DIVERSITY RANK	FIRM NAME	2020 DIVERSITY SCORE*	% OF MINORITY ATTORNEYS	% OF MINORITY PARTNERS	TOTAL U.S. ATTORNEYS
1	N/A	Berry Appleman	72.40	49.7%	22.7%	169
2	1	Fragomen	59.50	35.1%	24.4%	393
3	26	Wood Smith	57.10	38.9%	18.2%	311
4	2	White & Case	54.40	33.7%	20.7%	881
5	12	Kobre & Kim	49.00	27.4%	21.6%	62
6	5	Fenwick	48.40	33.0%	15.4%	342
7	10	Cleary Gottlieb	47.90	30.4%	17.5%	626
8	4	WILSON SONSINI	47.50	28.7%	18.8%	787
9	7	Best	46.20	26.4%	19.8%	202
10	9	Morrison & Foerster	45.80	28.1%	17.7%	712

The firm ranked No. 8 overall in the 2020 Diversity Scorecard, with 28.7 percent minority attorneys and 18.8 percent minority partners in 2019, and ranked No. 4 for percentage of Asian American attorneys. When taking into consideration the percentages of only those law firms with more than 600 attorneys, Wilson Sonsini ranked No. 3 overall. Wilson Sonsini has historically ranked very highly in the Diversity



Continued on page 16...

## Diversity at Wilson Sonsini *(Continued from page 15)*

Scorecard, including three consecutive years in which the firm was ranked No. 1 overall.

- In May 2020, Wilson Sonsini was recognized as a top firm for hiring practices relating to gender equity and diversity in **Yale Law Women's** 15th annual **Top Firms for Gender Equity & Family Friendliness Report**. Each year, Yale Law Women produces the report to raise awareness of inequities within the legal profession, highlight progress being made in the industry, and identify areas for improvement.

Against this backdrop, our programs and events are designed to foster professional development and offer participants the opportunity to establish meaningful relationships with their colleagues. For instance, our Women's Initiative Task Force hosts panels and brown-bag lunches to discuss issues relevant to female associates. The firm's diverse partners host Affinity Group networking receptions and other internal social activities designed to promote mentoring relationships.

### Recruiting

We strive to attract the best legal talent from all backgrounds and devote significant resources to sponsor events, programs, and organizations committed to building a pipeline of diverse attorneys.

In 2020, we hosted a diverse summer associate class for our six-week virtual program, with 50 percent of our 78 summer associates being women, 27 percent being racial/ethnic minorities,

and 12 percent being LGBTQ+. We will continue to build the law school diversity pipeline by supporting and strengthening our firm's relationships with diverse on-campus student groups.

For many years, the Wilson Sonsini Foundation has annually sponsored a **Diversity Scholarship through California ChangeLawyers** to assist incoming first-year law students from historically underrepresented groups in the legal profession who have committed to attend a California law school. Starting this year, the Wilson Sonsini Foundation is supporting two diversity scholars for the next three academic school years.

We also partner with Law Preview on the **Law Preview Scholars Program**. Through this diversity pipeline and recruiting program, we sponsor a law school preparatory course for five diverse first-year law students at the University of Michigan Law School. Our participation ensures that diverse law students enter law school armed with the tools needed to succeed during their first year.

In addition, as part of the **Diversity Scholar Program of PracticePro**, a San Francisco-based legal education start-up, we sponsored the Northern California region in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, and plan to do so again in 2020-2021. PracticePro's Diversity Scholar Program was launched in 2014 to support law students from groups that have been historically underrepresented in the legal profession, including racial, ethnic, and gender groups, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and those with physical disabilities.



At a time when many law firms are reducing their budgets, we have increased our investment in PracticePro and become a **Law School Mastery Founding Member**. PracticePro's Law School Mastery (LSM) program is an immersive law school prep and coaching program that aims to equip incoming diverse 1Ls with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to succeed in their first semester of law school, understand the legal recruiting landscape, and position themselves for long-term success at prominent law firms and Fortune 500 companies.

The program recently selected an inaugural class of LSM Scholars from across the United States. It will begin with a series of live virtual training webinars that will introduce scholars to knowledge and skills that will help them thrive in law school, including issue spotting, exam and study skills, legal writing, and time management, as well as information on how legal recruiting works and how to maximize the chances of obtaining 1L summer firm jobs. LSM Scholars are also provided with a designated career coach, a tutor, and a mentor from a sponsor firm.

We are proud to share these accolades and initiatives, and reiterate our continued commitment to diversity both here at the firm and across the profession.



## Meet the Women in Our Latest Partner Class, Part II *(Continued from page 1)*

### **What kind of opportunities has the firm afforded you?**

I am incredibly grateful that the firm has afforded me the opportunity to truly build and shape my practice to align with my passions and interests, as well as the flexibility to adjust this path as my career has developed. I started my career working mostly with early-stage companies, where I was responsible for and accountable to clients early on. From that training ground, I continued to hone my technical skills and developed experience with later-stage private companies and IPOs. Today, I represent the full range of private companies and continue to work on public offerings, and it is this breadth of work experiences that continues to make what I do so engaging and fulfilling.

### **What do you enjoy most about your work?**

I feel fortunate that I work with an incredible community of intelligent, thoughtful, hardworking, and kind colleagues and clients. Over the years, I have developed wonderful professional relationships and friendships, and it is this network of delightful humans that has truly made my practice enjoyable.

### **What are your thoughts on the role or importance of diversity at the firm? In the industry more generally?**

Diversity is vital—at Wilson Sonsini, in the legal industry more broadly, and in society just generally. I believe we should acknowledge and affirm the importance of diversity and openly discuss and address how our different backgrounds and experiences create unique opportunities and challenges in our professional and personal capacities. Sometimes these conversations can be difficult, but I think they are necessary to make progress. I am grateful that the firm has a strong commitment to

diversity and inclusion, and I am hopeful we will continue to strengthen our efforts to promote equality and opportunity.

### **What attributes would you say are most important for success in the legal profession?**

It's critical to develop skills for communicating effectively—both with colleagues and clients. In addition, it's incredibly important to not only develop technical expertise, but also be keenly focused on understanding and addressing the business and strategic concerns of clients and provide clear, practical guidance. Ultimately, I believe what is most important is the ability to develop client trust and rapport—if your client is in crisis, they need to know that they can have full confidence and trust in your guidance.

### **What advice would you offer to young attorneys just starting out in their careers?**

Focus on developing relationships both inside and outside of the firm. Having supportive mentors has been vital to my development. I am immensely grateful for all the investments that my mentors have made in me, and it is knowing how impactful this can be that motivates me to mentor and train others.

### **If you weren't an attorney, what might you be?**

An anthropologist.

### **What has been most challenging for you about the current public health situation? How has it changed the nature of your day-to-day client work?**

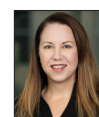
I am fortunate to have a great home office setup and an incredibly supportive partner, both of which have allowed for a very smooth transition to working from home. I do thoroughly miss seeing my

colleagues and having all the informal social interactions that are critical to building a community.

With clients, building rapport can similarly be more difficult exclusively with phone and video interactions, but I have found that this environment has also presented unique opportunities. Where it is now more difficult to separate our personal and professional worlds, I have embraced this as a moment to acknowledge these challenges more openly, which allows us to get to know each other better and be able to understand and have more empathy for all the responsibilities and duties we each have beyond our professional lives.

### **What have you learned about yourself as a result of the pandemic? Have you discovered or developed any new skills?**

I have discovered that I am both an incredibly enthusiastic and indecisive chef.



### **Natalie Morgan**

*Litigation, San Diego  
J.D., University of San Diego  
School of Law, 2000*

### **How did you get started in the legal profession? Did you always know you wanted to be an attorney?**

I knew I wanted to be an attorney back in high school—and even more specifically, I knew I wanted to be a litigator. I went to a small high school where we were lucky enough to have an elective called “Conducting a Trial,” where we did discovery, collected evidence, and put on a full-blown trial with a jury and a judge. It was an amazing experience and I enjoyed it so thoroughly that it reconfirmed my desire to be a litigator.

## Meet the Women in Our Latest Partner Class, Part II *(Continued from page 17)*

When I was headed to college, I knew I only needed to identify what kind of litigation I wanted to practice. I settled on patent litigation pretty quickly because I was excited by technology and innovation, and the specialization that's involved. I made sure to obtain a background in chemistry, biology, physics, and engineering so that I would have some understanding of each when the technology at issue required it. In addition, that knowledge gave me a sufficient technical background to become a registered agent for the USPTO.

### **What brought you to Wilson Sonsini?**

The large global firm that I joined after law school imploded after the dot-com bust in the early 2000s. The group of attorneys I decided to follow in the aftermath of the break-up was looking for the right home. About a year after we had settled in a place that was not quite the right fit, Wilson Sonsini was ready to open a San Diego office. I liked that the firm was cautious, reasoned, and clearly didn't make rash decisions. I joined with that same group of attorneys. I think I was the second associate in San Diego. The firm provided what we were looking for as a group and what I was looking for individually: a fantastic platform to service high-tech, life sciences, and emerging growth clients with a strong patent litigation practice. It appeared to be a place where, as an associate, you could get heavy responsibilities and important roles if you demonstrated you were capable. Both were absolutely true.

### **What kinds of opportunities has the firm afforded you?**

I've had the extraordinary opportunity to have heavy responsibility and significant in-court experiences/roles early and throughout my career at Wilson Sonsini. I think it's been the result of a combination of firm culture

and the partners and senior associates I worked with—and really, the people are a reflection of firm culture, so the two go hand-in-hand. And I've had significant roles on bet-the-company cases. For example, just a year or so ago, I was one of the trial counsel that defended against an almost \$1 billion damages claim. The jury found in our client's favor. Having the opportunity to work on those kinds of important cases—as well as the responsibility to do some of the most important work in those cases—is something you can find here, and it's been fantastic for my career growth.

### **What do you enjoy most about your work?**

Along with enjoying the opportunities for meaningful work, I really enjoy the diversity of my practice. I have a rather unique practice among our patent litigators. Right now, I have four pharmaceutical cases, two software cases, three medical device or diagnostic cases, and a complex cellular technology case. It is a very diverse practice in terms of technology, and in terms of the clients I service, which range from very large public companies to small private companies launching their first commercial product. That's what I love most; they are each different experiences—the big clients, the small clients, and the different types of technology.

### **What are your thoughts on the role or importance of diversity at the firm? In the industry more generally?**

It is of critical importance—and judges do notice. More than once, I have had judges comment when one side is 100 percent white men, and my side is not. A judge has also positively commented when every attorney on my side of the courtroom is a woman. Clients notice as well. As our in-house contacts are increasingly diverse, I

think it is important to reflect that with our teams that service our clients. Most importantly, diverse people with different backgrounds and life experiences bring something different to the table. I've always learned the most from being exposed to something outside my normal way of thinking or being. We can't have those opportunities to learn from others if we don't make diversity a priority.

### **What attributes would you say are most important for success in the legal profession?**

From my perspective as a litigator, a high attention to detail and good communication skills are the most important. Of course, to join a top-tier firm, you have to be hardworking and smart, but to really excel, you need to have very careful attention to detail and be a good communicator in email, briefs, and orally (whether formal or informal). A key issue can often turn on a small fact that, if overlooked or not thoroughly vetted, can be determinative for your case or claim. Thus, a high attention to detail is very important to building a successful case (or argument). Likewise, if you cannot effectively communicate your research, the suggested course of action, the caveats you need to warn your team or the client of, or the argument to the judge or jury, you will not be an effective litigator. Luckily, you can learn and/or hone these skills, but you have to put in the time and effort to do so.

### **What advice would you offer to young attorneys just starting out in their careers?**

Provide good service to everyone, whether it is another associate, a partner, or a client, just as if you are submitting something to the court that the world will see. And make sure you are proud of everything you turn in.

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## Meet the Women in Our Latest Partner Class, Part II *(Continued from page 18)*

### **If you weren't an attorney, what might you be?**

I am a dog lover (I'm told I'm "dog crazy") and I love to cook. I don't know what I'd do exactly, but it would have to involve one or both of those things.

### **What has been most challenging for you about the current public health situation? How has it changed the nature of your day-to-day client work?**

My day-to-day work hasn't changed much, because as a litigator I have periods where I'll travel for an entire month and won't be in the office for weeks at a time. As a result, I'm used to working remotely and talking to team members by phone or video as needed or to simply stay connected. Right now, it just feels like I'm out for a *very* extended period. Since I'm at home, the biggest challenge has been to cut off my work day. More and more, I find myself doing work late into the night on a very regular basis simply because I have my computer set up on my kitchen island. It's very easy to work around the clock, maybe because the scenery doesn't change. That's been the most challenging aspect for me.

### **What have you learned about yourself as a result of the pandemic? Have you discovered or developed any new skills?**

I've become even better at juggling and multitasking, and I was already pretty good at that! I think we've all had to become even better at keeping multiple balls in the air.



**Christina Poulsen**

*Corporate, Palo Alto  
J.D., UC Davis School of Law, 2009*

### **How did you get started in the legal profession? Did you always know you wanted to be an attorney?**

After college, I worked as a corporate paralegal at a law firm in New York. I had a formative experience there and met many wonderful attorneys who encouraged me to pursue a career in law. My interest in law developed in college and grew once I actually had a chance to work in a law firm environment.

### **What brought you to Wilson Sonsini?**

I joined Wilson Sonsini as a summer associate and have been at the firm ever since. I came to Wilson because I wanted to work at a firm with a dynamic corporate practice that had interesting and inspiring clients.

### **What kind of opportunities has the firm afforded you?**

Countless opportunities. I have been able to work on so many interesting types of transactions with great teams and clients. One of my favorite experiences was being in Times Square last year with our whole corporate IPO team when our client IGM Biosciences rang the opening bell at Nasdaq's headquarters in connection with their initial public offering. It was incredible to be there to celebrate that important milestone with our client and team.

### **What do you enjoy most about your work?**

My clients. I feel lucky to work every day to help solve the legal problems of the most interesting and forward-thinking companies.

### **What are your thoughts on the role or importance of diversity at the firm? In the industry more generally?**

Diversity is critically important both for our firm and the legal industry as a whole. I believe that the firm needs to be representative of our clients and our community at large. Diversity of experience and viewpoints makes us

better at serving our clients. As a firm, we have made great progress in this regard and I know it is a key focus area for the firm moving forward.

### **What attributes would you say are most important for success in the legal profession?**

You have to have the ability to hone in on the aspects of being a lawyer that you really like and use those aspects to stay motivated and inspired to always do your best work.

### **What advice would you offer to young attorneys just starting out in their careers?**

I think that the most successful young attorneys have an open mind about their career. As a new attorney, often what you think you want to do in theory does not always line up with what works best for you in practice. So, give yourself the opportunity to figure this out early on. Take the time to do the hard work of honest self-reflection early in your career so that you can engineer your own career path that plays to your strengths and is fulfilling.

In addition, for diverse attorneys in particular, I encourage you to take up space, sit at the table, and share your views, as we need your voices here at the firm and in the legal profession more generally.

### **If you weren't an attorney, what might you be?**

A diplomat. I had many friends growing up overseas whose parents were diplomats and they always had the most interesting stories and experiences—plus, I love to throw a good party!

### **What has been most challenging for you about the current public health situation? How has it changed the nature of your day-to-day client work?**

## Meet the Women in Our Latest Partner Class, Part II *(Continued from page 19)*

All of the unknowns are a challenge. I feel fortunate that Wilson Sonsini has been so communicative and supportive of its employees during this period, and our town hall meetings and informal check-ins have provided stability. Working for a supportive firm has helped me to continue doing my day-to-day client work quite seamlessly.

### **What have you learned about yourself as a result of the pandemic? Have you discovered or developed any new skills?**

I may have a second career baking bread! But in all seriousness, I think it is too soon to know what we will learn from living through a global pandemic and how this will affect our behaviors in the future. Whenever we return to a new normal, however, I am hopeful we can incorporate some of the more positive aspects from this period of working remotely.



**Melissa Rick**

*Corporate, Palo Alto  
J.D., Boston University School of  
Law, 2010*

### **How did you get started in the legal profession? Did you always know you wanted to be an attorney?**

My father was an attorney, so I was exposed to the legal profession early on and thought it would be of interest. At the same time, I felt it was important to confirm that I wanted to be an attorney on my own, not just because it was familiar. I pursued a number of legal and non-legal internships and other opportunities to help solidify my interest in the legal profession. At each turn, I became more confident that the practice of law was for me.

Prior to and during law school, I tried a few internships in litigation, which

cemented my interest in becoming a corporate lawyer. The collaborative nature of corporate legal practice fit my personality. Corporate transactions usually follow a quick cycle of weeks or months as opposed to years, and I was drawn to the turnover of new projects at a quick pace.

### **What brought you to Wilson Sonsini?**

I actually had an offer to come to Wilson Sonsini as a summer associate, but it was during the last recession and I was a little spooked about moving out to Silicon Valley. So, I decided to stay in Boston, where I attended law school, to start my career there. I remained in Boston for a number of years, but, after so many winters, in 2015 I decided it was the right time to move to California and lateraled to the firm.

If you're doing emerging companies work, IPOs for tech and life sciences companies, and financings, Wilson Sonsini is the leading law firm. When I was thinking about coming to Silicon Valley, I had a short list of firms I would consider, and Wilson was at the top of the list. After meeting the attorneys I would be working with, it was easy to see myself at Wilson, and that's proven true over time.

### **What kind of opportunities has the firm afforded you?**

I'm thankful for the leadership of the partners that I work with and how much they've taken an interest in my career. It is hard to name the numerous opportunities I've had as an attorney, and now as a partner, at Wilson Sonsini. One opportunity I will note is that the firm has fully supported my commitment to working with nonprofits on a pro bono basis. Pro bono work for nonprofit organizations continues to be a key part of my day-to-day practice, and the firm provides numerous resources to support this effort.

### **What do you enjoy most about your work?**

It's always nice to work on high-profile, complicated transactions where we're doing something that is so unique and important for our clients. I enjoy providing that expertise and experience that makes our services so valuable.

### **What are your thoughts on the role or importance of diversity at the firm? In the industry more generally?**

I think diversity is critical for law firms and businesses in general. It's important to have a breadth of voices, and our clients similarly are coming from a number of different backgrounds, so it's essential for client relationships that we also have a diverse team.

### **What attributes would you say are most important for success in the legal profession?**

I'd say that a positive attitude and a willingness to work hard, run with projects, try new things, and take ownership are the most important attributes for success.

### **What advice would you offer to young attorneys just starting out in their careers?**

Be thoughtful about your career at each stage of it. Think about what you want to do and what you want to accomplish, and be mindful of the work you're doing, who you're working with, and where you're working. And re-evaluate those things at every stage of your career, so that you can continue to grow. Make sure you're doing the things you love and working with people you enjoy working with.

### **If you weren't an attorney, what might you be?**

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## Meet the Women in Our Latest Partner Class, Part II *(Continued from page 20)*

Honestly, I'd probably be doing some other type of business work.

### **What has been most challenging for you about the current public health situation? How has it changed the nature of your day-to-day client work?**

We're having to learn how to manage teams remotely and stay connected with each other in a personal way that used to happen naturally in the hallways of the office.

I think our attorneys and staff have stepped up and made the transition to remote work seamless for our clients, but we still need to be mindful of how not to lose the personal aspects of working with colleagues you enjoy seeing every day.

### **What have you learned about yourself as a result of the pandemic? Have you discovered or developed any new skills?**

I have been practicing piano.



**Lori Will**

*Litigation, Wilmington  
J.D., University of Pennsylvania  
Law School, 2009*

### **How did you get started in the legal profession? Did you always know you wanted to be an attorney?**

I've wanted to be an attorney—a litigator specifically—since childhood. I set out wanting to practice death row defense but ended up finding my niche in corporate law during law school.

### **What brought you to Wilson Sonsini?**

The clients and the culture. The idea of representing clients who are improving the world really appealed to me. Wilson Sonsini's emphasis on creativity and

collaboration, not to mention the great group of people in the Delaware office, was also important to me in deciding to join the firm.

### **What kinds of opportunities has the firm afforded you?**

The firm has been incredibly supportive of my growth as an attorney in so many ways, and I've been given opportunities that I know would be impossible elsewhere. I have been able to litigate novel cases for interesting clients at the same time that I'm encouraged to teach law school classes and take on pro bono work.

### **What do you enjoy most about your work?**

My colleagues! My favorite cases are the ones where we're faced with a seemingly impossible task and come together as a team to solve a problem. Even the toughest cases are a pleasure with a group of colleagues I enjoy spending time with.

### **What are your thoughts on the role or importance of diversity at the firm? In the industry more generally?**

I often tell my kids that our differences are what make the world a beautiful place. That applies to our firm. Embracing diversity in its many forms is what allows us to innovate and succeed. But the industry has a long way to go. At least in my area of practice, there are still stereotypes about what a lawyer should look like, which make it challenging for someone who doesn't fit into that box. We all must take responsibility to change that.

### **What attributes would you say are most important for success in the legal profession?**

Hard work, creativity, and the ability to listen.

### **What advice would you offer to young attorneys just starting out in their careers?**

Don't be afraid to ask questions. This takes many forms. If you don't understand an assignment, ask! Ask for the deadline. Ask the follow-up questions. Ask for another opportunity, or to work with someone new. If you don't, new experiences will pass you by.

### **If you weren't an attorney, what might you be?**

I would be a novelist with a side job as a sommelier.

### **What has been most challenging for you about the current public health situation? How has it changed the nature of your day-to-day client work?**

Being physically separated from colleagues and clients has been a challenge, especially when many of us are juggling families at home. I've embraced things like Jabber and Teams for having a constant dialogue with my colleagues, which has made a big difference in staying connected. I've also found that videoconferencing and seeing someone face to face—even through a screen—goes a long way in relationship-building with clients versus a phone call.

### **What have you learned about yourself as a result of the pandemic? Have you discovered or developed any new skills?**

I was a gym rat in pre-COVID life, but have found that I actually enjoy running—something I could never get into before. After spending too much time in my home office, nothing is more freeing than a trail run. This is important since I've also become an ice cream connoisseur during the pandemic.

## Wilson Sonsini Achieves Mansfield Plus Certification for Second Straight Year

On September 15, 2020, Diversity Lab announced that Wilson Sonsini has—for the second consecutive year—achieved Mansfield Plus Certification, signifying that at least 30 percent of the firm’s appointments to leadership roles, promotions to equity partner, senior-level lateral hires, and inclusion in formal business pitches were women attorneys, attorneys of color, LGBTQ+ attorneys, and attorneys with disabilities. After participating in the Mansfield 3.0 pilot program for law firms, we were named among the 100 leading firms to receive this latest certification. We also achieved Mansfield Plus Certification in August 2019 after participating in the Mansfield 2.0 pilot program.



**Mansfield Rule**<sup>™</sup>  
Certified *Plus* 2020  
Powered by DIVERSITYLAB

The Mansfield Rule, named after Arabella Mansfield, the first woman admitted to practice law in the United States, was one of the winning ideas from the 2016 Women in Law Hackathon, a pitch competition created by the Diversity Lab in collaboration with Stanford Law School and Bloomberg Law. The first Mansfield Rule pilot program was launched in 2017, and in 2018, more than 65 law firms, including Wilson Sonsini, signed on to participate in the Mansfield 2.0 pilot, which ended in July 2019. The Mansfield 3.0 pilot added attorneys living with disabilities as a tracked category.

For more information on this latest Mansfield Plus Certification, visit <https://www.diversitylab.com/pilot-projects/mansfield-rule-3-0/>.

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