

## Talking Points: Iris Carbonel

2020 CHARLES J. BEARD, II DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

Columbia Law School student Iris Carbonel has been selected as one of Foley Hoag's 2020 Charles J. Beard, II Diversity Fellowship recipients. Iris received her Bachelor of Arts from New York University where she focused her studies on social justice, power structures and the politics of race. In this interview, Iris reflects on her time as a summer associate at the firm.

### Why did you want to become a lawyer?

My initial interest for wanting to become a lawyer stemmed from my own personal experiences as an immigrant growing up in a low-income, minority neighborhood and seeing the power the law could have in effecting change. I decided to become a lawyer because I wanted to be an advocate and a problem solver. I also wanted to be in a profession where I could be constantly learning, crossing disciplines, and being intellectually challenged. To me, lawyers are translators, and I was intrigued by the idea of facilitating knowledge by taking complex, intangible ideas and concepts and making those accessible and digestible to others.

### What drew you to Foley Hoag?

When searching and deciding on a law firm, I looked for four criteria: Diversity, social responsibility, training and professional development, and firm culture. These principles guided my decision-making, and Foley Hoag met my vision of what I was looking for in a workplace.

I was impressed with the Foley Hoag Foundation. Its existence and the work it's doing is a clear indication of the firm's commitment not just to the Boston community but also to addressing inequalities and pushing forward racial justice. As a Bostonian, it's really important for me to be at a firm that genuinely cares about and is dedicated to pouring back into the communities that gave so much to me.



*Iris Carbonel*

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In terms of professional development, I felt that Foley Hoag's size would give me more opportunities to engage with senior associates and partners and take on more responsibility earlier in my legal career. Being here this summer, I see that many individuals at the firm, including my mentor, are committed to my personal and professional growth.

Finally, something that really stood out to me, though minor, was that most, if not all, of my interviewers responded to the thank you emails I wrote following my interviews, and some emailed me to express their enthusiasm when they learned I accepted the offer. To me, these small gestures spoke volumes to the culture of the firm and the people in it.

### What do you hope to gain from your experience at Foley Hoag?

I'm leaning towards litigation because that is a focus in law school. However, I'm really hoping to gain insight into different departments and practice areas, so I'm hoping that I'll have the opportunity to explore transactional work and administrative law. Most of all, I want to engage in substantive and challenging legal work and receive thoughtful feedback to help me grow professionally. I'm also hoping to have the opportunity to connect with a wide array of people at the firm through formal and informal social gatherings.

### What do you envision for your future law career?

I am still charting a path for my legal career. I'm interested in clerking for a federal judge a couple of years after law school and honing in on and sharpening my skillset as a lawyer. I do know that some of my core interests include racial and economic justice, immigration, community organizing and activism. In the short term, I hope to direct efforts into those areas of interest by maintaining a solid pro bono practice. Thinking longer term, I hope to be engaging in impact litigation work in some capacity. Ultimately, I want my work to have a meaningful effect on my clients, and to have a platform to be able to give back both in my capacity as a lawyer and as an individual.

### Why is mentorship important to you?

As a first-generation student, mentors have played a very important role in my life, offering college advising, academic support and guidance navigating spaces. Because others have invested time, effort, resources and knowledge in me, I understand the importance of paying it forward to those who might themselves be in need of the same. I mentor because people have mentored me. I advocate for others because others have advocated for me. Even in my short time here at Foley, I have leaned on my mentor, and she has pointed me towards people I should try to connect with, has been there to candidly answer difficult and uncomfortable questions, and has given me advice on navigating this profession as a woman of color.

### What does representation, especially in big law, mean to you?

It is very hard to imagine yourself in a position or in a profession where no one who looks like you currently exists. Seeing a Black partner, a Latinx partner, a woman partner is significant because it shows underrepresented students that this is something that is realistic and available to them. By entering into spaces where people like me have historically been underrepresented, I hope to pave pathways for the next generation to be able to find a seat at these tables. I want to show younger students that big law is something that's attainable, something they can do if they want to, so that we're not closing any doors just by the mere lack of diversity in a space.

### What else do you want to share about your experience?

I was really happy to be involved with the Foley Hoag Foundation Expedited Grant Round this summer. Though grant proposal reviews don't typically happen during this time of the year, following George Floyd's death, the firm donated \$290,000 towards the Foundation to distribute to organizations in the Boston, New York City and D.C. areas engaging in racial justice work. To see the firm financially contribute to the movement was very important to me, and it was refreshing to see that the firm and the Foundation are committed to this work and supporting the needs of the community.