



Earning an LL.M. Shaped My Career

BY KATJA GARVEY

Law school in my home country of Germany is a little different than in the U.S. First, aspiring lawyers go to law school right out of high school. After about five years they take the first bar exam, and eventually take a second bar exam after a two-year rotation program that requires them to work with a judge, a prosecutor and then in private practice for a few months each.

The law school I attended at the University of Passau had a study abroad program with Capital University Law School. In 2007, after my second year of law school, I traveled to Columbus as an exchange student at Capital. In addition to gathering substantive knowledge about the U.S. legal system, I really enjoyed spending time in Columbus. I was able to experience the city, make connections and forge friendships. Ultimately, this played a key role in helping me decide to apply for

the Master of Laws (LL.M.) Program at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, and return to Columbus in 2011.

The other major decider that influenced my application was the LL.M. program itself. Open to lawyers and law school grads from other countries, it is a one-year program designed for fulltime students, but with flexibility for part-time students. Students are mostly free to choose their classes based on their objectives, which range from taking a bar exam in one of the U.S. states, solely focusing on obtaining a U.S. law degree, or specializing in a certain area of law, which requires at least 12 credit hours in that area. I chose to specialize in business law.

My class was an interesting mix, with several students already living in Columbus before the program, and several that had just arrived in the U.S. for the very first time a few days before orientation. My class was

fairly small, with 12 students from all over the world, including Brazil, Dominican Republic, India, Ireland, China, Tajikistan and Sudan. My classmates had diverse goals, as well. Some were planning to get their degree and go back to their home country where it would be highly regarded. Others planned to take the bar exam and gain some work experience before heading back home. Some, like me, would stay here and work as a U.S. attorney.

No matter our individual goals, we all participated in classes just like any J.D. student and took the same exams. In my second semester, I made the decision to take the Ohio Bar Exam and started preparing for the application process. As a foreign attorney, I had to fulfill certain conditions to be able to take the Ohio bar, or any other state's bar exams for that matter.

In Ohio, to be eligible to apply to the bar, the Ohio Supreme Court must find that the candidate with a foreign law degree has equivalent education of a J.D. graduate. Then, the candidate must go through a rigorous review process of their foreign credits and show that the credits are from an ABA-approved law school. Once approved by the Ohio Supreme Court, LL.M.s have to go through the same character and fitness process as any other applicant, and then pass the bar exam.

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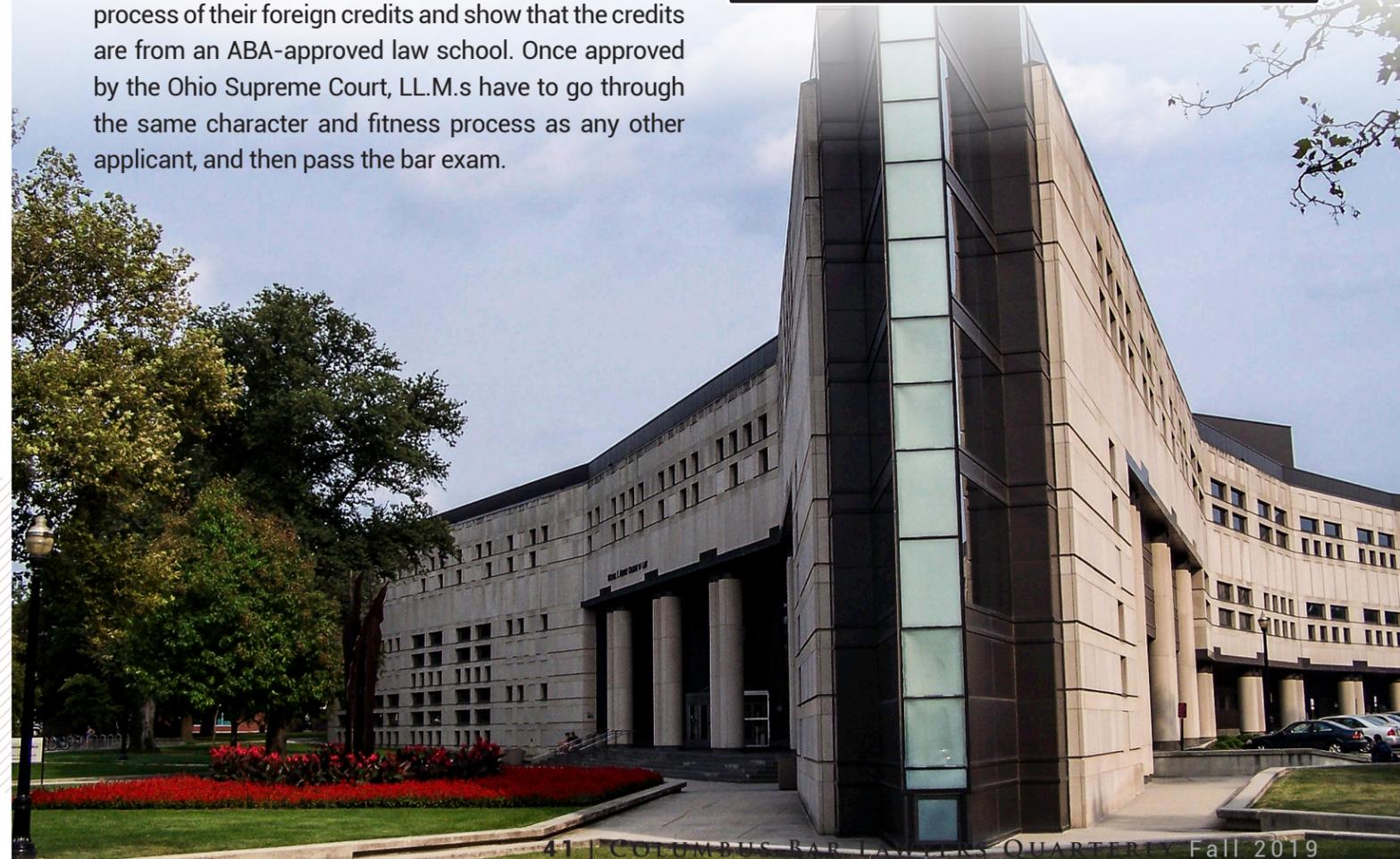


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“The year-long LL.M. program is designed for lawyers from across the globe interested in learning about the American legal system and is intentionally limited to 30-35 students. The program offers specializations in key legal areas, including alternative dispute resolution, corporate law, intellectual property, international law, and more. Students have the opportunity to learn both in and outside of the classroom through internships, moot court and a variety of clinics. In addition, LL.M. students have the option to apply to transfer from Ohio State's LL.M. to the J.D. program.”

“In 2018, the law school celebrated the 10th anniversary of its LL.M. program, with the largest and most diverse class to date—39 students from 15 countries, including China, Nigeria, Mexico, Israel, Russia & Brazil—to name a few. More than 260 international LL.M. graduates from more than 50 countries are now counted among Moritz alumni.”

Laura Fernández-Álvarez, Esq.
Assistant Dean for International and Graduate Affairs at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law



I am proud to say that I am the first LL.M. from Moritz to pass the Ohio bar exam and like to joke that the passage rate for LL.M.s that year was 100 percent (the national average is under 50), without, of course, mentioning that I was the only one.

It wasn't until after I had passed the bar and was working as a staff attorney at a local workers' compensation law firm that I connected with the amazing global business team at Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter. I joined the team in 2013 and have been advising U.S. and global businesses on corporate and privacy issues ever since.

Since my experience, the program has continued to grow. It has expanded to about 30 students each year and the number of students taking and passing the Ohio bar has grown, too. The growth of this program is both beneficial for foreign lawyers, as earning an LL.M. is a fantastic opportunity for them to leverage their foreign law degree and learn about the U.S. legal system, and an advantage for U.S. law firms or companies doing business abroad, as they are able to add someone with a unique set of skills to their team.

My background and knowledge of German law and doing business in the EU in general has been useful to many of my clients, ranging from European companies setting up subsidiaries in the U.S., or requiring assistance with operations here,

to U.S. companies with operations abroad, including compliance work with respect to the EU's recent data protection law, the General Data Protection Regulation.

Coupled with my German legal background, my language skills and general cultural understanding have been invaluable to clients when drafting agreements and during long video conferences with dozens of participants who don't all speak sufficient-enough English to follow the discussions. In addition to working with international clients, I have also helped expand my firm's global efforts through a three months secondment with the law firm Friedrich Graf von Westphalen in Freiburg, Germany.

I'm proud to continue being a part of Moritz's LL.M. program by serving as co-chair of the International & Graduate Affairs Advisory Council, helping to support new LL.M. students through mentoring, networking and career development programs. Earning my LL.M. has been incredibly rewarding and invaluable in shaping my career, and I look forward to helping others shape theirs.

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