



Dahlia Fetouh

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Dahlia was a Partner in the Firm's Litigation Department, where she spent over 13 years. She has been in-house at MIT since 2016, where her practice includes managing the Institute's involvement in litigation and other legal proceedings and providing advice on a wide variety of matters concerning student life, intellectual property, employment, compliance, risk and other Institute affairs.

In-House Perspective

Q: What made you decide to go in-house after over 13 years at Goodwin?

A: It was something I had been thinking about for a while. I really enjoyed my time at Goodwin, but honestly, I stayed about 11 years longer than I thought I would when I started! When I joined as a young lawyer, I thought I would try out the "Big Firm" thing for a couple of years before moving on to a public service role. But I enjoyed my time at Goodwin more than I thought I would, including both the people with whom I worked and the type of work I did. Eventually though, a time came when I felt I was ready to find a position that was more mission-driven. I started thinking closely about higher education as the next step for me since it would provide an opportunity to do challenging, complex work in support of an important educational and research mission.

Q: Do you think working at Goodwin prepared you to go in-house?

A: Absolutely. Goodwin set me up well for any success I have had in-house. Goodwin provided me with opportunities to try out different practice areas, develop my written work and oral advocacy, and build interpersonal skills as I learned to work with people who brought many different perspectives. Those skills have all served me well in-house.

Q: Is there a big difference between being outside counsel verses being the client now?

A: I certainly enjoy not having to record my time! But seriously, the work is different in some ways, but, at the end of the day, we are still in the client service business whether we are in-house or outside counsel. The main goal for both roles is to support and serve our clients. One nice difference about being in-house is that I have the chance to work with our clients early on to help solve problems before they arise and avoid the kinds of issues that might otherwise require outside counsel. We have a chance to be true thought partners with our clients from the beginning.

Q: What does a typical day of an in-house lawyer in education look like?

A: Each day varies, so I don't know if there is a "typical day," but most of my days include meetings with internal clients or outside counsel to discuss a current issue. I also frequently participate in committee meetings or working group meetings, where I can collaborate with colleagues around MIT who have been brought together to address critical issues facing the Institute. But most of my work involves one-on-one counseling with our clients – answering questions, brainstorming ideas, considering options. We work collaboratively to think through different issues and (hopefully) find solutions before problems arise or discover useful opportunities.

Q: What do you think are the most rewarding parts of your role at MIT?

A: It boils down to MIT's mission statement, which is to solve the world's greatest challenges. The mission is as ambitious as that. And while I am certainly not the one in the lab doing the cutting-edge research that is going to find a solution for climate change or cure cancer, it is a privilege to know that I am a small part of an organization that is devoted to such ambitious goals.

Q: What makes you continue to choose MIT?

A: In many ways, it is the mission and the opportunity to contribute. But it is also the culture and the people at MIT. MIT consists of a cross-section of dedicated individuals from all over the world and from every discipline – it is incredibly rewarding to work with them to try to achieve the best for MIT and its community. And luckily, we have developed positive relationships around the Institute so our contributions are welcomed. I know that is not always the case for people who go in-house at other organizations, where in-house lawyers may be viewed with some skepticism. So, I feel privileged to be part of a system that works so well.

Career Perspective

Q: What do you think is the best career advice you have ever gotten?

A: When I was starting out, one of the most useful pieces of advice I heard came from my partner mentor, who emphasized the importance of identifying your own voice. We see a lot of different models around us as we are coming up through the ranks. I kept wondering if I needed to model myself after others in order to be a successful litigator. Eventually, I realized the best path to success for me was to find my own voice and find a path to success that matched my personality and approach.

Q: You did a significant amount of pro bono work while at Goodwin. Can you share a little bit more about those contributions?

A: I was active in pro bono cases throughout my time at Goodwin and they were meaningful on a number of levels. First, it was important for me to make sure that I was doing something through my professional career that gave back to the community in some way. The pro bono opportunities at Goodwin gave me that opportunity to contribute. But second, they also gave me terrific opportunities to develop my skill set as an attorney. I was able to do things on pro bono cases sooner than I could in other cases. For instance, my first oral argument in a federal court was a motion to dismiss in a pro bono case – it was an empowering moment that gave me the confidence and experience to take on more challenges in my career. I strongly encourage young lawyers to take on pro bono work whenever possible.

Personal Perspective

Q: What do you like to do outside of work?

A: I have three teenage children who dictate all of my time, so what I would like to be doing and what I end up doing in my free time are probably two different things. I do a lot of driving to soccer fields and baseball fields in my free time. But I love to read and travel, so I try and make sure we fit in as much of that as we can.

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