

University of Kentucky Alumni Association

KENTUCKY

Alumni

SUMMER 2016

Roula
ALLOUCH:

Defending rights
and liberties for all

Alumna earns UK College of Law Community Service Alumni Award

Even at a young age, Roula Allouch '02 BE, LAW '06 was a lawyer-in-training.

"As soon as I told my mom that I wanted to go to law school, she laughingly said, 'Well, that makes sense,' because I would always advocate for what I felt was the just position," Allouch says. "Growing up, I was the kind of kid who didn't like to take naps often, and my mom said that I would argue to her, 'Why can't I just sit quietly and read if I'm not tired?'"

But law is about more than a well-timed rejoinder. Allouch, who practices civil litigation in Cincinnati, including defending personal injury actions and product liability claims, also views her role as a means to serve the community, particularly advocating on behalf of fellow Muslim Americans concerned about civil rights in post-9/11 America.

"I felt a patriotic duty to work to defend the rights and liberties, not just for the American Muslim community, but for all of us," she says. "The experience I got at UK Law helped to lay the foundation for being able to assist and serve the community."

This month, Allouch received the UK College of Law Community Service Alumni Award in large part because of her volunteer work for the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. Allouch is chairwoman of CAIR's national board.

The award is given annually to a graduate who has provided outstanding leadership at the local, state or national level toward causes not necessarily related to the legal profession.

Of her selection, "Roula is a remarkable example of a young lawyer and activist whose passion and dedication has a significant influence on both the profession and her community," says David A. Brennen, dean of the UK College of Law.

"Many people in my class and other attorneys who have graduated from UK serve the community in many different capacities, so it's humbling to know that I was selected," Allouch says. "But I take it more as a reflection of the importance of the volunteer work that I'm able to do with CAIR."

A new path

Allouch was born in Wisconsin to Syrian immigrants (her father came to the United States in the 1970s to serve his medical internship and residency), and she moved with her family, including five siblings, to Kentucky when she was a few months old. Allouch lived in Leslie County, but primarily grew up in Berea and Lexington.

A self-described "lifelong Kentuckian," she was an economics major at UK and minored in decision science and information. Allouch enjoyed computers and figured that she'd work

"in some type of analysis position" upon graduation. But as is the case with many an undergraduate, higher education is as much a journey of discovery as it is acquiring the skills necessary to succeed in industry.

Economics, it turns out, is about more than allocating money and resources to satisfy wants. The field also provides an important avenue toward understanding the effects of laws on a society.

That realization set Allouch on a new path.

As a sophomore, she took a career assessment test, which suggested that a legal career might be a good fit.

"That started to point me in the direction of going to law school," Allouch says. "The idea developed around my junior or senior year, and I really started thinking seriously about it. Things were falling into place."

She enrolled at the UK College of Law where, once again, her expectations were upended. Allouch initially thought that she'd practice transactional or business law because of her undergraduate degree. That's until she took part in her first mock trial, which gave her an up-close look at legal niceties. She liked what she saw.

"I really loved the idea of trial and courtroom work, and that's when I started to proceed down that route," Allouch says. "I enjoyed the process, arguing facts to support your argument and presenting the case to a judge and jury."

Roula ALLOUCH

Defending rights and liberties for all

By: Andrew Faught

“Roula is a remarkable example of a young lawyer and activist whose passion and dedication has a significant influence on both the profession and her community.”

David A. Brennan, dean of the UK College of Law



“Roula was a proud Muslim woman who wore the hijab with courage and pride. After spending five minutes with her, you knew you had met a woman with extraordinary potential, who was also just a normal law student facing all the typical law school fears.”

Professor Allison Connelly, '80 AS, '83 LAW

In the past two years, she says she has tried five jury trials. Preparation, Allouch notes, is key to being a successful attorney.

“I’m the type of person who, the night before the trial starts, will lay everything out and review the case from beginning to end,” she says. “Some might say that’s overkill, but for me it’s important to feel as prepared as possible and to really know the ins and outs of a case. That’s what I learned as a younger attorney, trying cases at times against more experienced attorneys. My preparation could help balance comparatively with their experience.”

Academic challenges and a UK mentor

Allouch enrolled at UK in part to remain near family, but also because of the institution’s academic strengths. She singles out law Professor Allison Connelly ’80 AS, ’83 LAW as an important mentor and friend. “She was invaluable in supporting me and encouraging me in law school,” Allouch says. “I always love the chance to see her from time to time since graduating.”

Connelly recalls meeting Allouch during her protégé’s first year of law school. Donning a hijab, or headscarf, as a show of faith, Allouch was the only Muslim in her class.

“Roula was a proud Muslim woman who wore the hijab with courage and pride,” Connelly says. “After spending five minutes with her, you knew you had met a woman with extraordinary potential, who was also just a normal law student facing all the typical law school fears. We immediately bonded and became close.”

Connelly calls Allouch “an image breaker and a peacemaker.”

“As the chair of CAIR, Roula has used her legal expertise and dedication to empower and encourage American Muslims to break down the misconceptions people have about Islam, to seek peace with others in the community,” she adds.

Allouch also draws plaudits from CAIR colleague James Jones, the organization’s national board secretary.

“Roula is bright and a quick study who has a ready smile,” he says. “But she always brings seriousness and a robust work ethic to any task she takes on. Further, she is an excellent CAIR representative because she reads both social and political dynamics very well. She knows how to put people at ease, no matter what their political or ethnic background is.”

Connelly’s support, meanwhile, was especially critical given that Allouch is the only lawyer in her family. Despite her zeal for the profession, Allouch knew little of what to expect in law school. She got some of her most important lessons by taking part in the college’s legal clinic, which opened across the street from the College of Law in 1997.

Under Connelly’s direction, the clinic allows students to counsel and represent needy clients on civil legal matters. Third-year law students represent clients before state agencies and in state court proceedings. Part of their duties includes



Photo: Jeremy Kramer

interviewing clients, drafting legal documents, filing pleadings and conducting discovery.

Allouch consulted with Connelly on cases and calls student work representing clients “a very beneficial opportunity. It was a gratifying feeling being able to help someone who needed that assistance.”

It was at the UK College of Law where Allouch learned the approach that she abides by to this day. “I tend to stay calm and try to analyze the best approach to a situation, and that’s definitely something they teach and emphasize in law school,” she says.

“Professor Connelly, especially in my first year, but also in my second and third year and thereafter, was open and available and would answer my questions,” Allouch says. “She helped me build confidence in myself, and be able to be successful in law school and then in practice.”

At a time when Muslims in the United States increasingly were subject to hate crimes, Connelly recalls Allouch quickly broke down barriers with all who came in contact with her at the clinic. “It was a thing of beauty to see how Roula took a client’s preconceived notion of Islam and Muslim women and completely changed that client’s view based on her skills, compassion and brains,” she says. “She changed a lot of clients’ hearts and minds that semester.”

Allouch also volunteered for the CAIR Kentucky board while in law school, focusing on civil rights and advocacy work for the American Muslim community in the tri-state area. Some of her work focused on employment discrimination and providing diversity training for companies. Allouch also took part in interfaith activities that sought to build bridges between the Muslim community and other faiths.

During her time in law school, Allouch was a prosecutorial intern for the late Brian Mattone ’97 LAW, first assistant county attorney in Fayette County. Allouch argued motions in court and remembers peppering Mattone with jurisprudence questions.

“He was patient with me and supported me in the first argument that I ever made in court,” she says. “Overall, the benefit of my UK Law experience was being connected to other attorneys.”

“**Roula is bright and a quick study who has a ready smile. But she always brings seriousness and a robust work ethic to any task she takes on.**”

James Jones, CAIR board secretary



Photo: Courtesy of Kathy Anderson and ABA Journal

Roula Allouch chats with a colleague during a mid-year American Bar Association meeting in Houston.

Early career and community service

At her first job out of law school at the Crestview Hills firm of O’Hara Ruberg Taylor Sloan & Sergent, Allouch says she benefitted from working with other UK College of Law alumni and says, “I couldn’t have started at a better place.”

In recent years Allouch has returned the favor. She’s spoken to law students at UK on panels highlighting legal work. She also volunteers for the Kentucky Bar Association, for which she serves as a representative of the Young Lawyers Division, working as co-coordinator of the division’s 2014-15 public service project. Project Street Youth considered legal issues facing homeless and transitional youths, suggesting protocols for attorneys working with such clients.

Additionally, Allouch sits on the council of the American Bar Association’s Rule of Law Initiative for the Middle East and North Africa. The initiative works with nongovernmental organizations to promote democracy in the region.

Then, like now, Allouch chuckles at the challenge to strike a balance between her professional and personal life. The job can be all-consuming — she’s frequently taking depositions, working with expert witnesses and making court appearances — but Allouch says she takes time out to go bicycling and hiking.

She’s also a rabid Wildcats basketball fan who tries to attend at least one game a season. Allouch says she comes from a “basketball-watching family,” so she watches the games closely.

“March is my favorite time of year because the days get longer and a little warmer, hopefully, and March Madness is a big part of that, as well,” she notes. “Final Four or bust!”

Even though the Wildcats made an early exit from this year’s tournament, Allouch is finding victories elsewhere, particularly in the rule of law.

“Ultimately for me, it’s having an underlying belief that justice should be served and everybody has the right to have their position advocated for,” she says. “It comes down to my belief in justice and equality, and those are the main things that push my volunteer work with CAIR. I have a tremendous respect for the rule of law, and I am privileged to be part of that process.”