

[MUSIC PLAYING]

CORDEL FAULK: Hi. I'm Cordel Faulk, assistant dean and chief admissions officer at the University of Virginia School of Law. In this episode of "Law Schooled," we talked to second year law student Rachel Barnes. Rachel describes what it was like moving to town as the events of August 11 and 12, 2017 were happening. She also talks about her term as president of the Black Law Students Association. Admissions director Ashley Merritt joins us, too.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Thank you for joining us for "Law Schooled," this edition of "Law Schooled." Rachel, will you introduce yourself? So we're here with Rachel Barnes, the outgoing--

ASHLEY She's introducing herself.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know. But I'll say a little bit-- the outgoing president of BLSA, after an adventuresome year as president of BLSA. So Rachel, why don't we talk about who Rachel Barnes is and who you were before you showed up at this lovely institution?

RACHEL BARNES: I would be happy to.

CORDEL FAULK: Thank you.

RACHEL BARNES: Thank you for that. [LAUGHTER]

So I'm Rachel. I'm a 2L JD/MBA student here at UVA. I'm originally from Atlanta, Georgia, went to the University of Georgia for undergrad, studied Econ and Spanish. And before coming to law school, I worked as a global mobility specialist in Atlanta at a law firm.

CORDEL FAULK: That is an amazing title. That is an amazing title.

ASHLEY What does that mean?

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, right. That is an amazing title. I love that title. That sounds good.

RACHEL BARNES: That means basically that I specialize in sending people from one place in the world to-- and I could send them anywhere else in the world. So if you had an engineer in Malaysia who needed to go to Ireland, Ireland to China, China to India, India to the US, anything like that, I could get people permanent residence, marriage certificates, birth certificates. Basically all things travel mobility related.

CORDEL FAULK: I would hire you to do anything after that. Seriously. That is like amazing experience.

ASHLEY Yeah. I can't even-- I'm like trying to wrap my mind--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, I know.

ASHLEY --what that day to day looks like.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know.

[INTERPOSING VOICES] /

CORDEL FAULK: We need this everywhere. Like everywhere I work, I want that. I know, right. We try solutions specialist?

ASHLEY So I was going to say, but I couldn't think of what it was called. Thank you for [INAUDIBLE].

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: [INAUDIBLE] was a solution specialist. So we're learning all these titles that we are falling in love with. Wait, how did you wind up in that job? Because now we're fascinated by this.

ASHLEY Let's do it.

MERRITT:

RACHEL BARNES: So I really, I knew that I didn't want to go straight to law school. I wanted to see--

CORDEL FAULK: Let's talk about that in a minute. Because I do want to talk about that.

RACHEL BARNES: Sure. I was on Indeed and just very creative with my searches. And immigration paralegal was my initial position. And then I kind of moved up into the global space. So I spoke enough Spanish to get by. I speak French, varying levels of French, Spanish, English, Russian, and Portuguese. And so I leveraged that and my interest in law to--

CORDEL FAULK: Wait, people need to understand that we are super amazed. Like, our students do these insane things. OK.

ASHLEY Casual five languages.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, right, right.

ASHLEY Casual.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I'm barely doing English these days.

RACHEL BARNES: And so I used those things to kind of leverage a position with the firm. And then from there, the people who were handling global when I got there all kind of left abruptly. So they were like, hey-- it started with a very easy question. They were like, hey, could you do this Chinese business visa? And I said, sure. And then the floodgates opened and all of a sudden I was servicing all of the Atlanta office, all of the immigration partners, and then from time to time doing cases for different offices within the firm.

CORDEL FAULK: Wait. So you officially migrated from paralegal over? Or were you paralegal and--

RACHEL BARNES: I was paralegal and, but there became a point, because I was the only paralegal doing it, there came a point where it was just kind of like I was the emergency backup for US work. I was primarily doing global, which I really liked. I got to interface with people all over the world, deal with clients and deal with difficult cases and figure out what to do, especially when clients give you like two lines, they're like, we want to send this guy to India. How can we do that?

CORDEL FAULK: That was it? Like that was--

RACHEL BARNES: Yeah, it would be that short. And then it's like, well, what do they do? What are their education qualifications? How long will they be there? What will they do there? And so knowing how to problem solve through those things quickly, because a lot of times it was in urgent cases, like with oil and gas and stuff. So knowing how to navigate all of that became a very fun skill.

CORDEL FAULK: That is super important. That's a super important skill at a law firm is problem solving. Because like almost every job--

ASHLEY As a lawyer.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Exactly. Almost every job at the law firm is some type of problem solving. Things don't wind up in the lawyer's lap because they're easy. They don't wind up at the law firm because they're easy.

ASHLEY They're not paying a lot of money for something that they can--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: For you to solve the easy-- exactly. Right. Right.

You enjoyed it?

RACHEL BARNES: I did. I loved it a lot. Maybe I'll circle back to it someday. But interested in corporate--

CORDEL FAULK: Logistics. Actually, I really like logistics. I think it's very interesting.

ASHLEY Operations.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah. OK, so you mentioned you decided to take some time off instead of K through JD. So we talk to a lot of folks who are trying to make the decision, do I want to go K through JD, or do I want to take some time off and do a gap year or gap couple of years? Would you mind walking us through your thought process as you were making the decision? OK, it's probably best for me to do that--

ASHLEY Take some time. Sure.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: And wait, here's the thing, like you're an AKA. I love an AKA's thought process. Because nobody, no group of people has better thought process than AKA.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

RACHEL BARNES: However--

CORDEL FAULK: I know, AKA is a very good with thought processes.

ASHLEY We are going to have some serious [INAUDIBLE], some Deltas are going to call up.

MERRITT:

RACHEL BARNES: I love and support all the [INAUDIBLE]. It's wonderful.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, yes.

RACHEL BARNES: But know thyself.

CORDEL FAULK: If you want somebody to run something, AKAs know how to run things. And no comment on anybody else, but AKAs know how to run things.

RACHEL BARNES: I was very proactive in undergrad. My senior year I interned at the DA's office in Athens, Georgia. That was just by reaching out and saying, hey, I'm a pre-law student, do you guys have anything? And they kind of let me tag along with stuff.

CORDEL FAULK: Did you know going into college, pre-law?

RACHEL BARNES: No. I went into college wanting to be a chemistry teacher.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, interesting. OK.

RACHEL BARNES: And then chemistry did not work out. So I had to walk it back and figure out what else made sense in high school. And Econ had always made sense to me. So I switched over. And then it didn't stop making sense, so I graduated with that.

But then the other part of that was what do I want to do with my life. And I felt like law is very integral in a lot of different spaces and is a very flexible career. And so that was the other piece. And I did mock trial from high school and I still do mock trial now. I've just finished being regional mock trial director. So law school made sense.

CORDEL FAULK: [INAUDIBLE]

RACHEL BARNES: [INAUDIBLE], yes.

ASHLEY Mid Atlantic--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Mid Atlantic, yeah. I knew you were going to catch-- I knew, I was like, she's going to catch this.

ASHLEY All the acronyms.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, right, I know.

RACHEL BARNES: So having interned, I had seen kind of the criminal justice, public service side of law life. But I wanted to get more experience. I'm someone who likes to have all the information before I make a decision. So I wanted to get some firm experience and see what a law firm is like. Because I felt like it probably wasn't going to be the same as being in a courthouse, being in a courtroom, et cetera. So I sought out positions, paralegal positions. I got my paralegal certificate in my last semester of undergrad, as well, and used that, plus languages, to land my immigration paralegal job.

And I decided to do that instead of going straight to law school, because partly I knew that I wanted to take some time to just take a breath. I loved undergrad. It was a lot of fun. But I felt like if I kept going, I was going to burn out energy wise. And so I wanted to take that time to just focus on having a full time job, seeing what that's like, enjoying paid vacation days and things like that, and just exploring life outside of school before I went back.

And so I took two years off. I did one year was just kind of an adjustment year for me, where I figured out how to navigate my full-time job. And the second year was like, OK, this was cool, let's get into school mode. And that gave me a little bit more breathing room. Because even if you take one year off, you still have to consider you have to take the LSAT, interviews, and things like that. That whole gap year is still a prep year.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, yeah. It's very busy. And it's very expensive.

RACHEL BARNES: Exactly. So having two years to kind of take my time was nice. And one thing I try to encourage people to do is think about your path and your trajectory and not get too hung up on, oh, well it's two years and all my friends are about to graduate from this and that. Because after undergrad, the continuum kind of stops. And it's all about what makes sense for you and your plans versus comparing yourself to other people. Because if you rush and go to law school when you're not ready, financially, emotionally, whatever, then you won't be happy and that will hinder your success at everything, and then you won't achieve what you planned to achieve.

CORDEL FAULK: I think that's a good thing that you just said. Because as people are thinking about K through

JD, like break it down financially, emotionally. Does this makes sen-- professionally, does this make sense to jump into it immediately? Just kind of to set that up kind of as an organizational thought process, I think is a good way to think about this.

ASHLEY Yeah. Because for some people, it does make sense.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: For some people it does make sense, right.

ASHLEY But for a lot of people--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: If you're breaking it down and you're like, you know, financially right now, I probably need a couple of years. I shouldn't do this, even if the other things line up. Or emotionally, I'm kind of exhausted, I might want to take some time off. And if you break it down into component parts, it's probably easier to think through that decision.

ASHLEY Right. Right.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: So that-- I think they're very good. So very good.

ASHLEY Very thoughtful.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, seriously, very thoughtful.

ASHLEY Unsurprising.

MERRITT:

RACHEL BARNES:And so the people I talk to you, like everybody who I've interacted with who took time off, they were happy about that. It felt like they've matured as people. They got different work experience, which can be valuable in things like that, especially the first year job hunt. And the people who went straight through generally, if they had gone back, a lot of them said they would probably take maybe a year or so. And the few that were like, yeah, K through JD was the choice for me, usually their response is, I felt like if I didn't do it now, I wasn't going to do it ever, or just time wise it wasn't going to line up.

CORDEL FAULK: I did K through JD. And for me, it made sense. But even for me, it making sense, I looked

around at my friends who took time off and I understood the benefit of it. And I think they did it the better way, even though for me, at that moment, it made sense to go through, straight K through JD.

RACHEL BARNES: So also, I decided to stick with the job that I was at for the full gap. Because I wanted to have that continuity on my resume and show that I could commit to a job and stick with it and hold it down. And I felt like I would also be able to build more social capital in one space doing a good job for this group and build goodwill, good connections, versus jumping from job to job where no one knows me enough to give me any kind of reference or any kind of skill. Because the minute you switch jobs, you have to start over, even if you know what you were doing at the last job. And I was lucky enough to be in a space, in a firm that I really liked that gave me really good experience. And that's opportunity.

CORDEL FAULK: Very good. Well, let's get to the central question now. So you've made the decision, you want to go to law school. How did you then go through the thought process of choosing to come to this law school, choosing to come to UVA Law?

RACHEL BARNES: Sure. Well, initially, the things I considered were where I wanted to practice after law school, how much I was willing to spend on law school, what kind of feel I wanted from the law school itself, and then location. So when it came down to-- I might have repeated. Did I repeat the question?

CORDEL FAULK: No, you didn't.

ASHLEY I don't think so.

MERRITT:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

RACHEL BARNES: So when it came to-- location was a big one for me. Because being someone who grew up in Georgia, born and raised, worked there and everything, I felt like if I didn't leave the state for grad school, I was never going to leave. Because I would realistically get a job there and settle down, and life happens after graduation and things and you just get kind of sucked in and it's harder to move.

So for me, I knew I didn't want to be in Georgia. When it came to-- what was my other one-- I'm losing all of it.

CORDEL FAULK: Where you want to practice?

RACHEL BARNES: Yeah, where I wanted to practice after, that was it. I thought about schools and their brand recognition and where they could get me long term. I knew that I wanted to aim for the best school I could get into and be somewhere, either in the location that I wanted to practice after, or be somewhere that's strong enough that I could go anywhere. And I knew if I went to schools in the southeast, it would probably tie me well into the southeast, if that's where I wanted to be. But I wasn't confident that that's where I wanted to practice long term. Turns out I don't want to be in the southeast. But yeah we'll get there.

CORDEL FAULK: I know we're going to get there. I know we're going to get there.

RACHEL BARNES: So because of that, I had my sights set as high as possible. And I thought I wanted to practice in DC. So initially, my eyes were set on DMV schools, so Maryland, DC, Virginia. Then from there, I decided I didn't want to be--

CORDEL FAULK: So financially.

RACHEL BARNES: Oh, financially. Yeah, let's go to financial. Financially, I decided that education is an investment. It's good debt. So I decided not to shy away from maybe a higher price tag if it gave me a better trade-off as far as career outcomes, benefits from professional opportunities, networking and things.

CORDEL FAULK: So that's how you were framing good debt?

RACHEL BARNES: Yeah. Yeah, good debt. If I felt like I could come out on the other side and be in a comfortable position versus taking on all this debt and then coming out in a tight spot where I wasn't sure if I had a job or wasn't sure if I would have the mobility to go other places. Because I did have full rides offers for different places. I did have lower price tags at other schools that weren't Virginia, but I decided that because of the feel that I got here, this was a good place for me.

So once I decided that I didn't want to be in a city, to avoid distractions and things, I'd set my sights on small college town type areas. And so when I visited UVA, I felt like it checked off many of the boxes, as far as being a good school, not in a city, cost was decided to just let that one go, and gave me the opportunity to be flexible as far as future stuff. I visited and I felt like the people I met here were very accessible and very invested in the futures of the students who attend this law school.

And that was not the case at every school that I interacted with. I felt like at some schools, they didn't know my name, they wanted to know what my LSAT score was, what my GPA was, and like, what's your ID number and they'll look me up. But here Cordell knew my name. Ashley wasn't here yet, but I'm sure Ashley would have known my name.

CORDEL FAULK: Patrice. No, Patrice was excited.

RACHEL BARNES: Yes, Patrice knew. But she was also AKA.

CORDEL FAULK: Patrice [INAUDIBLE]. Yes. Yes.

RACHEL BARNES: But I felt like people were very friendly, very willing to help. And it came off genuine. And no one was trying to sell me, I felt like.

CORDEL FAULK: Genuinely, we're not trying to sell anybody. What we're trying to do is, our theory is, let's introduce people. And people for whom they feel like this makes sense, they will make the selection. But we're not trying to sell anybody.

RACHEL BARNES: Exactly.

CORDEL FAULK: We don't want to convince somebody of something they wouldn't do on their own.

ASHLEY Right, right.

MERRITT:

RACHEL BARNES: So I thought about what kind of law school experience I wanted. And I felt like in the event that I did need something, I wanted to be in an environment where people cared enough to help me and be available to me. And UVA felt like that place from the top down. Dean, students, faculty, staff, everybody who works here, everybody who attends this school is here because they care about the people who are here and they want to build that community. And I really liked that. And that was something that was even better than my undergrad experience. Because UVA was very similar to UGA, as far as like the college town feel.

CORDEL FAULK: The towns are very, very, very similar.

RACHEL BARNES: And so the icing on the cake was having the community feeling, where people were invested and knew your name and cared about you, me as a person.

CORDEL FAULK: So you thought you were going to find that. Did you find that? Do you feel like you have found

that?

RACHEL BARNES: I definitely have found that. And I'm excited to be a part of it now, and I can pass it on and forward or however that goes.

ASHLEY Pay it forward.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: As people who are watching you do that, I think you're doing it very, very well.

RACHEL BARNES: Thank you. But yeah, it's wonderful to see that everything I thought this was going to be, it is, as far as people being truly invested, from the peer advisor program to Community Fellows, affinity groups, all sorts of support that UVA provides is all very genuine. And people, it's kind of infectious, you get sucked into it and then you can't help but want to give back and be a part of that community, as well. Because it is a valuable resource to have, especially when you're going through a new experience as a 1L or as a transfer student, as well, in a new place, to have people around you who are willing to help you and willing to support you, I think, is very, very valuable.

CORDEL FAULK: Excellent. So you had a very interesting experience moving in.

RACHEL BARNES: Yes.

CORDEL FAULK: Would you mind sharing some of the story about your move-in day to Charlottesville?

RACHEL BARNES: Sure. So I drove overnight from Atlanta to come to Charlottesville on August 11. And I was playing the radio the whole time, so I didn't really have any news on or anything like that. And it was late. Like I said, went through the night. So I had told--

CORDEL FAULK: This was 2017, for folks who want to anchor it. So it was a very, very, very active day here in Charlottesville, that you're listening to as you're driving up.

RACHEL BARNES: So I had told some BLSA members that I was planning to move in. I met them at admitted students weekend. Everyone should go to admitted students weekend. It's lots of fun.

CORDEL FAULK: It was a lot of fun, yeah, it was a lot of fun.

RACHEL BARNES: People I had met there, I told them when I was moving in. So I moved into my apartment. I lived on campus-- supersecret, there's on grounds housing.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

RACHEL BARNES: You don't have to be off-campus.

CORDEL FAULK: I know, yeah. Many students don't know.

ASHLEY I'm just saying-- the rare person [INAUDIBLE].

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: On grounds.

RACHEL BARNES: Right. So I was unpacking. And then one of the BLSA members called me and said, hey, where are you at? And I said, I'm about to go to Walmart. And she said, don't go to Walmart. The people have guns in Walmart and there's some things going on. And I said, what's going on? And she said, turn on your TV. And I was like, OK. And then I saw all of the protesting and counter protesting that was taking place on the downtown mall and at the school. And I was very scared.

I was very scared because it was very hard to glean what the context was and to what extent this event was happening. Was it an isolated incident in one area, or if this was something that was like statewide, nationwide, people are just targeting people of color and Jewish people and things like that. I was very scared. And I was very grateful that I had told people about it, because they came and got me from my apartment, fed me. And I spent the night at their apartment. And then the next day, Cordel-- maybe it wasn't the next day, but a few days of what?

CORDEL FAULK: I think it was the Sunday, it was that Sunday. So it was the--

ASHLEY The next day, yeah.

MERRITT:

RACHEL BARNES: The next day, Cordel reached out and invited me to dinner. And then all of the BLSA members, the new 1Ls, as well as upperclassmen met and just kind of did a check in to see how everybody was doing emotionally and see if anybody needed anything.

CORDEL FAULK: So from our thought process, we knew what was going on. We had been here all summer. We knew the build up. But we're sitting there and we're like, oh, my gosh, these people have just moved to town, they have no context for this, they don't know a whole lot of people. So we

were afraid you guys were sitting in your apartments like just afraid and frozen, because there wasn't anything for you to do. You didn't have an outlet. Those of us who were here, the administrators, faculty, staff, 2La and 3Ls, like we had each other. But we were like, oh, my gosh, these people are sitting there and they don't have us or know how to reach out to us, so that we can get through this together.

ASHLEY Right.

MERRITT:

RACHEL BARNES:And I got a flood of emails.

CORDEL FAULK: And that was Dean [INAUDIBLE]. She was like, what's going on here?

RACHEL BARNES:Yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: So she initiated that. She did, to her credit.

RACHEL BARNES:Yeah, Andy Davies, I got Kate Duvall, Career Services people were e-mailing me, just offering their homes as safe spaces, reaching out, offering, giving their personal cell phone, communication, out to anybody who needed it, who wanted some support or just needed a safe place to be or feel safe.

And that was my first impression of the law school community rallying around itself, which despite all the fear and concern, reaffirmed my decision to be here, which it seems odd because it's like, oh, all this racist chaos was happening. But the people who I expected to step up and support me and check in on me did. And that meant a lot, as well. Because that could have easily just been me by myself, like you said, in my apartment, scared, with no one to help me and no one to support me. And that wasn't the case. And I'm very grateful for that, for sure.

CORDEL FAULK: I know. I'm just thinking. Every once in a while, I'll see something and you go back to that moment and you realize, I'm not completely over that. Because it really was terrible. It really was awful.

So Ashley and I get a lot of questions about the aftermath. So did you want to reflect some on how the university moved forward after that? So from your point of view.

RACHEL BARNES:From my point of view, it was a little slow. But I felt like there were a lot of intentional steps, at

least by the law school, with Dean [INAUDIBLE] and stuff, to try to improve-- like increase security measures and make them more visible. Because a lot of people felt like they weren't sure what was supposed to happen. And so increasing the transparency, I thought, was a very important step that did take place and just making people aware of, this is what happens-- when these things happen, here's what's going to happen at the law school, here's what you should expect, this is what we do. And just giving that reassurance, I thought, was very valuable and very important.

From an emotional perspective, we kind of rallied around each other. There were a series of academic discussions, as well. Because law students--

ASHLEY A lot of legal issues implicated in that.

MERRITT:

RACHEL BARNES: Yeah. A lot of legal issues.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

CORDEL FAULK: It was intellectually interesting. Yeah. And you're right, second amendment, first amendment. Right.

RACHEL BARNES: And endless amounts of academic programming to unpack it, as well, which I found interesting and unexpected.

CORDEL FAULK: Welcome to law school.

RACHEL BARNES: Right, right. Welcome to law school. But it was definitely approached from all sides, from a community healing perspective, from an academic perspective, legal perspective, covered all the bases with that. It was very interesting to see it all unfold.

CORDEL FAULK: It really has been-- it was interesting living through it, and it's also been interesting watching the community and the university move forward. Because there were things that we needed to address.

ASHLEY Yeah. I think that's right.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: There were things, there were policy discussions that needed to be had at the law school and at the university. And then there were conversations that needed to happen between the

university and the community. And fortunately, Jim Ryan, the new president of UVA, was really interested in beginning some of those questions about the university's connection to the community and how we're relating to all parts of the community. And to his credit, I really do think it's important. And it was spurred on by these terrible events of August 11th and 12th. And I think that's the good that has come from these terrible events.

RACHEL BARNES: And I definitely think it has made people more willing to confront racism and be more open about calling it out. Because you can't pretend like that didn't happen.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, we can't.

RACHEL BARNES: So that's the baseline.

CORDEL FAULK: We can't hide from this, and I'm glad that we haven't, from it.

ASHLEY I think that's exactly right.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Well, back to Rachel. So after law school, so you've had to give that some thought now, where do you think you want to wind up practicing now and what do you think you want to do with your career?

RACHEL BARNES: Sure.

CORDEL FAULK: --halfway through law school.

RACHEL BARNES: Right. I'm only halfway through now, as a JD/MBA.

CORDEL FAULK: It's goes so fast now.

RACHEL BARNES: Got two more years. So the plan short term is to work in a law firm doing corporate legal work.

CORDEL FAULK: In Atlanta?

RACHEL BARNES: No, in Philadelphia, actually. I've already signed on to do that for this summer, next summer, and the indefinite future. So I'm excited about that, with a firm in Philly. And eventually, we'll see how much I'm in love with law firm life. So who knows? I might end up just being partner and taking over a law firm. But the plan--

CORDEL FAULK: Which you have the skills to do.

RACHEL BARNES: Thank you.

CORDEL FAULK: Which you do.

RACHEL BARNES: The plan is to transition with my MBA into an organization, hopefully with either a green mission, like renewable energy, things like that, or with a sustainable message, something like Patagonia, things like that, where companies that are doing good with their business, and taking over, operations officer, legal officer.

CORDEL FAULK: Logistics. I know. She knows how to do logistics.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

RACHEL BARNES: Just general world domination. And then also part of my motivation behind it is to just be someone who can one, be a role model. Because a lot of people-- how many black women do you know who are JD/MBAs who are in top positions and things like that. So just being in that space, being visible makes it a lot more feasible for people coming up behind me to see, oh, yeah, women are-- black women are CEOs, like people of color do this and that.

CORDEL FAULK: Yes, absolutely, right.

RACHEL BARNES: And normalizing it and making it something that seems more feasible. And also, being a resource. So if someone wants to know how I did it, I'm happy to tell everybody. And then also being in a position of power where I can advocate for increased diversity, increased inclusion. Because if I'm someone in a position of power, they have to listen to me. Because they're not going to ask the mid-level manager what they think about the hiring practices at the organization. They're going to ask the CEO, the COO. Those people are either making the decisions or somebody you have to go through to get to that decision.

And so I want to be that person to advocate and make sure that the practices that are going on, beyond hiring, just all of it is being done responsibly and being done in a way that's inclusive and promotes the best outcomes for not only the organization, but the people who work there.

CORDEL FAULK: Well, most of the folks who are listening to this are people who are thinking about the law school process, about applying, and the law school application process, or they're trying to decide where they want to go to law school. So let's unpack that a little bit. What advice would you have first for the folks who are trying to make the decision, do I want to go to law school?

RACHEL BARNES:When it comes to, do I want to go to law school, ooh, I would err on the side of do it, but also consider the costs, or I guess, the trade-offs that are involved with it, from a financial perspective, a time perspective--

CORDEL FAULK: Emotional?

RACHEL BARNES:Emotional perspective. Is it something-- do you feel like the investment that you'd be putting in emotionally, financially, physically, temporally, is worth what you'd be getting out of it? If you aspire to run a company or start your own business or work for the UN, like all those things can be done-- like anything can be done with a law degree, but you don't necessarily have to have one for everything. So thinking about what makes sense for your timeline, for your end goal is important. And if you're not sure what that is, that's OK.

But unpacking that, my eighth grade English teacher told me to think about what I wanted people to say about me when I died, and work back from there. And that's how I kind of settled on-- started with chemistry teacher, then moved to lawyer, still, with that same thought process in mind. Just for me, wanted to be how can I help the most people and touch the most people's lives in the time that I have and do good? It was like, well, what am I good at doing that helps people, and then work from there.

CORDEL FAULK: So part two, do you have advice for folks who are trying to make the where should I go to law school decision?

RACHEL BARNES:For sure. I would think about realistically and-- dream big, but be realistic at the same time. Think about what you bring to the table from a academic perspective. What's your GPA? What's your LSAT? And then also think about the intangible qualities that you have. Are you a person's person? Are you someone who's got a lot of work experience? Do you have an unusual background? Because all the law schools have averages that they aspire to for different rankings and things like that. But it doesn't mean you're necessarily should count yourself out. You can definitely aim high and fight your way in, if you have the tenacity to do so and the wherewithal to be proactive and creative with your search.

And then, like I said, with my analysis, think about where you want to be long term. If your family's from Virginia and you want to stay in Virginia, then think about Virginia, definitely think about UVA, and the quality of life that the schools in the area you're interested in could give you. And then from there, think about costs. Because I decided to be brave, but you know,

that's not realistic for everybody. So think about what kind of debt you're willing to take on and what kind of opportunities you would have if you take on that debt from a specific school.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct. And I think it's important to have those discussions with the school. Talk to the financial aid office about what will this look like in my specific instance. Because here, Jennifer [INAUDIBLE] is willing to have that conversation. You can judge a lot by how a law school interacts with that question.

RACHEL BARNES: Exactly. And that's the other piece is think about the environment you're going into. Because the school might look great on paper. But if you get there and it just doesn't make you feel at home or it doesn't make you feel like this is somewhere I could spend the next three years, don't do it.

CORDEL FAULK: Don't do it. Because you never leave a law school. You may not be on grounds or on campus there, but you are a part of that community forever. And those people are connected to you forever. Your career is hooked to theirs. So you need to make sure that I'm comfortable in this group of people, in addition to in this environment, because you rise and fall together.

RACHEL BARNES: Yeah.

ASHLEY Awesome.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Rachel, thank you so much for joining us today.

RACHEL BARNES: Thank you for having me.

[MUSIC PLAYING]