

A full-length portrait of Patricia Barkaskas, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black blazer, a grey top, a red necklace, and black pants. She is standing against a yellow background.

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Instructor (Tenure-Track)

Patricia Barkaskas was the first person in her family to complete secondary school, let alone a university degree. “My great grandfather went to residential school,” she explains “so I think there was always a deeply entrenched suspicion of formal education which had an effect for multiple generations.”

Despite this history, Barkaskas not only completed an undergraduate degree but an MA and a JD as well. Her motivation to attend law school came after doing legal research at Indian Residential Schools Resolutions Canada and realizing she wanted to more directly represent Indigenous people. “I didn’t know if I wanted to be lawyer,” she says, “but I knew that using the law was going to be a good way to do the work I wanted to do.”

It was through her experience as a student in the Indigenous Community Legal Clinic (ICLC) of the Allard School of Law that she “fell in love with court,” as she puts it — “with litigating and advocating for people, on my feet and on the ground. Armed with the knowledge I had from my academic background and what I was learning in law school, I felt I had so many tools I could really use to help people.”

Before eventually returning to the Allard School of Law as a faculty member, Barkaskas hung her own shingle and dove into running a private practice, as well as sub-contracting to other firms. She spent much of her time focused on criminal and prison law but began to realize it wasn’t what she wanted to focus on.

“I also wanted to practice family law, especially child protection,” she explains. “I wanted to diversify and work for Indigenous people as much as possible.”

Having been engaged regularly by the ICLC as an advising lawyer, when the ICLC director position opened up, it was a pivotal moment. She decided to move her career out of private practice and is today the ICLC’s Academic Director, as well as the Coordinator for the highly successful Judicial Externship program with the Provincial Court. And now she’s been appointed as a tenure-track Instructor, a faculty appointment with a specific focus on educational leadership (and one of two such appointments which are the first of their kind at the law school).

Barkaskas is proud of what these programs have accomplished, and looks forward to expanding on both in her new role.

“The Judicial Externship program just celebrated its ten year anniversary,” she says, “and the ICLC has been an institution in the Downtown Eastside for over 20 years. The impact of both programs, but particularly the ICLC, cannot be overstated. My colleague Mark Gervin [ICLC Legal Services Director] often tells our students that they might be the first person in a suit ever who has treated our clients with respect. The value of that is undeniable and we can’t ever forget that.” 