

Transactional lawyer embraces opportunities to learn and grow

By Brian Cox

What began as a move to San Diego for law school has become the foundation of Frances Strnad's legal career.

She'd arrived at the University of San Diego to begin her legal education in the fall of 2020, hoping to immerse herself in a new city and begin building her legal career. Instead, the pandemic made for an unconventional start, with much of her first year taking place remotely.

It was hardly the introduction she'd envisioned, but Strnad still found herself drawn to the city. She loved exploring its hiking trails, beaches, and neighborhoods, and established a routine that balanced the demands of law school with an outdoor lifestyle that makes San Diego unique.

Today, after earning her law degree and joining Ferris & Britton, APC in 2024, she can't imagine living anywhere else.

"I came here for law school, but I stayed because I found a place where I could build both my career and my life," she says.



Raised in the Sacramento, Calif. area, Strnad grew up in a family that emphasized hard work and education. Her parents immigrated to the United States from the Czech Republic and instilled in their children a deep appreciation for opportunity, as well as a curiosity about different perspectives and ways of life.

Regular visits to family in Europe exposed Strnad to different cultures and experiences from an early age, and she still speaks Czech today. Traveling abroad fostered a lifelong appreciation for experiencing other cultures and broadened her perspective on the world.

In high school, she enrolled in Advanced Placement classes, participated in yearbook and journalism, and developed a passion for helping others learn. As head of her high school's tutoring program, she organized fellow tutors and spent time helping classmates with assignments.

Through her experience tutoring and helping fellow students, she realized she enjoyed analyzing problems, clearly explaining solutions, and (most importantly) helping others. She dreamed of a career that would provide the intellectual challenge she was seeking while allowing her to help others solve difficult issues – law was a natural fit.

With her future law career in mind, she chose to study political science and international development studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). While there, she worked at a full-service business law firm, an experience that proved invaluable.

Through her experience at the firm, she was able to see the day-to-day aspects of both litigation and transactional work firsthand. Rather than courtroom advocacy, she found herself drawn to the collaborative nature of transactional law – drafting and negotiating contracts, helping businesses solve problems proactively, and advising clients throughout the life of their businesses. That clarity allowed her to tailor her law school coursework toward transactional practice from the outset.



Frances (second from right), who serves as an arbitrator for the University of San Diego's Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot (VICAM) team, gathers with fellow VICAM alumni at the team's annual fundraising gala.

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Frances and her fiancé, Casey, enjoy traveling and recently vacationed in Norway.

While at UCLA, Strnad also found a love of skiing. She joined UCLA's ski team, making frequent weekend trips to the mountains while balancing rigorous coursework and her law firm job. Managing academics, work, and travel taught her how to organize her time efficiently, a skill that would become even more important in law school and legal practice.

When she arrived at the University of San Diego in August 2020, however, the transition looked nothing like she had expected.

Instead of bustling classrooms and study groups, her first year consisted almost entirely of virtual classes from her living room, making it more difficult to build the relationships and routines that often define the law school experience.

Strnad adapted by creating her own structure. She intentionally stepped away from her computer to walk around her neighborhood or simply watch the sunset at the beach, recognizing that maintaining balance was essential to staying focused during the demanding first year of law school.

"It wasn't the law school experience I expected, but it taught me to be adaptable and intentional about building relationships," she says.

As more opportunities for in-person involvement became available, Strnad immersed herself in campus life.

She served as editor-in-chief of the University of San Diego's Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot (VICAM) team while also helping coach oral advocates, and she served on the executive board of the Business Law Society. The international arbitration competition combined many of her interests, including collaborating in a team, persuasive writing, and international perspectives.

Because of the pandemic, the team's first competitions were conducted virtually. By her third year, however, the team was able

to travel to Vienna, where Strnad interacted with law students from around the world.

"It was so interesting to talk to students from other countries and hear what law school was like for them. It really varies so much from country to country, and it just goes to show how different cultures, legal systems, and teaching styles shape the law school experience," she says.

The experience reinforced a belief she had developed through travel from an early age: that listening to different perspectives consistently reveals new insights and ways of understanding the world.

During law school, she completed transactional-focused internships with the general counsel of a biomedical research institute in La Jolla and later with an in-house legal department at a real estate investment company in Del Mar. Those experiences gave her practical exposure to drafting contracts, advising businesses, and understanding how legal counsel supports organizations from within.

She also excelled in contracts and finished at the top of her contract drafting class, strengthening her confidence that transactional practice suited both her interests and strengths.



Frances graduated from the University of San Diego School of Law in May 2023.

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After graduating law school and passing the California Bar in 2023, Strnad accepted a full-time position with the real estate company where she had interned. The role provided valuable continuity and further hands-on experience in transactional work. As she continued to develop her practice interests, she sought an opportunity that would allow her to broaden her experience and take on new challenges in a different environment.

That led her to Troutman Pepper Locke, where she worked on private equity finance matters. The experience provided exposure to complex transactions, demanding client work, and the pace of a national law firm, further strengthening her technical skills as a transactional attorney.

As she continued to define the type of practice she wanted to build, Strnad realized she was looking for an environment that combined sophisticated legal work with close client relationships, strong mentorship, and opportunities for continued professional development. Those priorities ultimately led her to Ferris & Britton, where she found an opportunity to continue developing her transactional practice while working closely with experienced attorneys and serving clients in a more personal capacity.

Founded in 1968, the boutique San Diego firm has built its reputation by providing advanced business legal services with the responsiveness and personal attention often associated with smaller firms. The firm's broad transactional practice offered opportunities to expand her experience across a diverse range of matters while working alongside attorneys committed to mentoring the next generation of lawyers.

Today, her practice focuses on estate planning and advising closely held businesses that need outside counsel for corporate governance, organizational matters, and ongoing legal support.

She enjoys the variety that comes with her practice. Each matter presents unique legal and business considerations, requiring thoughtful analysis, creativity, and practical problem-solving – qualities that first drew her to transactional law.

She also values the firm's investment in professional development. Ferris & Britton has encouraged her involvement in continuing legal education and networking opportunities, including participation in the annual Primerus Young Lawyers Section Conference. She also recently joined the executive committee of the Young Lawyers Section of Primerus, reflecting her commitment to professional involvement and leadership within the legal community.

Outside the office, Strnad remains as active as ever. She enjoys skiing, traveling, exploring San Diego's restaurant scene, and



Frances and a friend on a weekend ski trip in Big Bear, Calif. Frances has been skiing since she was young and was a member of the UCLA ski team during undergrad.

volunteering each year with the University of San Diego's VICAM team, serving as an arbitrator during practice competitions and supporting student fundraising efforts.

The city that first welcomed her during an isolated and uncertain chapter of law school has become home in every sense.

Looking ahead, Strnad plans to continue growing her transactional practice while deepening relationships with clients and colleagues throughout the San Diego legal community. She remains committed to continuous learning, professional involvement, and delivering practical legal guidance that helps businesses and individuals succeed.

"What I enjoy most about transactional law is that no two matters are exactly alike. Every day presents new challenges, opportunities to learn, and the chance to help clients achieve their goals," she says.