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## Alumni Spotlight: Nicole M. Mozee '16

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## WE ARE NEW YORK'S LAW SCHOOL



### Alumni Spotlight: Nicole M. Mozee '16

Julia Sonenshein • Published August 22, 2023

Our Alumni Spotlight Series highlights some of the most exciting, ambitious, and successful members of our alumni community—NYLS graduates who are making real differences in New York City and beyond.

In this installment, we caught up with Nicole M. Mozee '16, who is about to embark on a new career as a full-time faculty member at the newly opened Wilmington University School of Law. She shared her path toward advocacy, her appreciation for community, and the beauty of throwing out the plan.

#### Advocacy's the family business.



*Mozee embraces her father*

"I wanted to go to law school because of a story my dad told me," **Nicole M. Mozee '16** says with a laugh. Mozee is a first generation law student and while her father wasn't a lawyer, he was certainly an advocate; she says—"a champion for change." He told her about his work as a welder in the late 1960s and the employment discrimination he and his fellow Black employees faced. Mozee's dad led the charge for justice, coordinating walkouts and eventually filing a class action lawsuit with his co-workers.

Mozee was struck by his passion—but also the admiration he had for his legal team and the federal judge who presided over the case. "The way he spoke about them, the impact they had on his life—I realized that becoming a lawyer could be used as a way to effectuate change and to help people."

#### "This is where I can thrive."



*Mozee as a student at NYLS*

New York City was one of the best places to get exposure to civil rights and civil liberties, Mozee says, and so she decided to visit NYLS. "I just had a feeling when I got there," she says. "Like: This is it. This is where I need to be. This is where I can thrive."

What's more: NYLS offered Mozee a critical scholarship that allowed her to pursue law. For so many people hoping to begin a life of advocacy, law school comes with a prohibitive financial burden. "It's a gray cloud that hangs over our profession," Mozee says.

## “What did I get myself into?”



*The 2016 New York Law School Civil Rights Clinic with then-Professor Deborah Archer*

“I remember thinking: What did I get myself into?” Mozee says of those early days as a 1L. She was “dazed and confused” at first, a little out of place living in Brooklyn’s fast-paced life. But within that first month, she started connecting with her fellow students, and she and her friends started navigating the entirely new environment together.

Mozee really started to find her place at NYLS in her second year, when she joined the Wilf Impact Center for Public Interest Law (then called the Justice Action Center). She participated in the Street Law Program, which meant Friday trips up to a middle school in the Bronx to teach legal concepts—especially the Fourth Amendment, which was especially relevant given the stop-and-frisk policy. “Not only did I start to feel more comfortable in New York,” she says, “I felt like I was building a community. I started to discover who I was and who I wanted to be as an attorney.”

Mozee had planned to pursue corporate law, but her involvement with the Center and relationship with her faculty advisor, then-NYLS Professor Deborah Archer, convinced her to take another path. “I’m a community person. I’m a people person. I care about civil rights and civil liberties and social justice issues. That’s what I’m going to dedicate my legal career to,” she says. “And that’s exactly what I did.”

## “I was trying to rediscover myself.”



*Mozee sits for a mock argument with Professor Daniel A. Warshawsky and Molly Mauck '16*

Those first few years as a lawyer, “I was trying to rediscover myself,” she says. Back home in Delaware, there were setbacks, and Mozee had to dig deep to find her confidence. “I had to remind myself not only who I was or what my upbringing was—I had to remind myself I was surrounded and taught by phenomenal professors at NYLS. I know how to be a lawyer. And it was a matter of me reassuring myself and regaining that confidence to be the type of advocate I’m going to be,” she says.

Mozee had to pick a path, and she considered her experience and passions. Influenced by her father’s employment case, the Wagner Moot Court Competition fact pattern about a Title VII discrimination case she wrote, and her interest in policy work, she looked into the agencies in Delaware that would set her on that path. The Department of Labor fit the bill, and Mozee started working on employment discrimination cases.

Eventually, Mozee wanted more trial experience and joined a legal services agency doing family law with domestic violence and sexual assault survivors. The work was draining but hugely rewarding, she says. In 2020, she became the Deputy Attorney General for the Delaware Department of Justice.

## “It takes a certain set of skills and personality to be able to connect with students.”



*Mozee speaks at the University of Delaware Political Science and International Relations Commencement in 2022*

Mozee started as an adjunct professor at Wilmington University in 2021—certainly influenced by her father, who taught at a community college for over 20 years. “I strongly believe not everyone is meant to be a teacher,” she says. “It takes a certain set of skills and personality to be able to connect with students. I saw how my dad built relationships and how much his students admired him,” she says, and she started to see that she might have those necessary qualities, too. Mozee was hearing similar feedback from the law clerks who would work with her over summers—they were reacting to her like her dad’s students reacted to him. It was a pivotal moment: “Maybe I have more to offer than just being an advocate,” she thought.

## "I leaned on my NYLS family."



*The Wilmington University School of Law faculty*

Mozee loved teaching at the undergraduate level, and her classes focused on real-life scenarios and personal relevance for the students. She wasn't looking to leave the undergraduate level, but her department chair recommended her for a full-time role at the nascent Wilmington University School of Law, only the second law school in the state.

By this point, Mozee was happily splitting her time between teaching and the Delaware Department of Justice. She hadn't been looking to leave, but the opportunity was enticing. To help her make a decision, she "leaned on [her] NYLS family," she says. She reached out to **Dean and President Anthony W. Crowell** and **Professors Kris Franklin, Susan Abraham, and Doni Gewirtzman**.

She ultimately took the job, swayed by two ideas. First, she was "forever grateful to the law professors [she] had in [her] life," she says. "I would not be the attorney I am today had it not been for several people who believed in me, who poured into me as a student, and helped me realize my true potential." Becoming a member of law faculty was a way to "pay it forward," she says.

She was also drawn to the school's vision. "It really is re-imagining what legal education looks like—the affordability of it, the commitment to diversity, the emphasis on practical experience. Research and scholarship matters, but you also have to have professors in the trenches. This school is about to be something different."

## "Life works in so many mysterious ways."



*Mozee poses outside the United States Capitol in 2012*

"Doing criminal law was not part of my plan. Being a prosecutor absolutely was not part of my plan," she says. But Mozee maintained an openness that served her well.

"Life works in so many mysterious ways and sometimes you just have to walk by faith and not by sight," she says, and part of that is having faith in yourself—and the people who prop you up.

"I have all the tools I need. And I'm going to keep learning. I'm going to keep leaning on my community and my NYLS family to help me through it," she says. "I'm just really grateful."