

From Newcomb to Leadership: Kaye Courington's Journey

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A Newcomb education has proven transformative for countless alums. And after graduation, the Newcomb network can prove equally life-changing for graduates. Coming to Newcomb fed Kaye Courington's (NC '80, G *82, L *87) academic ambitions and opened her eyes to a way of viewing the world that placed women at the center. "I had never heard of any class like 'Women in Literature' or 'Women in Society,'" recalls Courington.

Equally important, says Courington, was how the top-tier women faculty and administration of Newcomb modeled the possibilities of achievement for undergraduates like herself. “You can’t be what you don’t see, and you were seeing women in leadership positions. It gave a subtle sense that anything is possible without anyone overtly saying that.”

After completing her bachelor’s at Newcomb, Courington would continue on at Tulane, receiving a Master of Education and later a Juris Doctor degree. Though women lawyers were relatively rare when she was first starting out, Courington’s educational experience of being surrounded by brilliant, accomplished women — and moreover ones who were taken seriously — was a source of strength as she navigated the at times perilous “old boys’ network” of parts of the legal profession. Today, Courington leads the largest women-majority-owned law firm in Louisiana.

She believes that relationship building can be a “superpower” for women and regards the Newcomb network as offering the perfect opportunity to spark and nurture connections. Sharing a vibrant educational background that highlights women, Newcomb alumnae, no matter their graduation year, location or career path, often find themselves with resonant experiences. Often, too, they are eager to help one another.

As Hina Shaikh (NC ’94, L *98) was working toward her undergraduate double major in history and anthropology at Newcomb, she was considering going on to law school and hoping to find an internship that would provide some exposure to the field. Courington, who was practicing in the area of asbestos/toxic torts litigation with a small firm at the time, was actively seeking interns from Newcomb.

Shaikh, who now who currently works at the U.S. Department of Commerce in federal financial assistance law, recalls, “In hindsight, this single connection led to so many great things, including Kaye giving me practical career and law school advice (and later life advice) and an enduring friendship.”

The internship with Courington exposed Shaikh to many aspects of the legal environment such as legal research, document reviews, document filing within the court and daily operations. She immediately applied to Tulane Law School, deferring for a year, traveling and working with Courington’s firm. During her second and third years of Tulane Law, she lived in an apartment over Courington’s garage, helping out as Courington managed balancing a growing family with her career.

“Without a doubt, the Newcomb network proved to be a gift, well beyond the ability to offer me career preparation,” says Shaikh. “Unwittingly, it gave Kaye and me an unbreakable friendship.

“The network can be an invaluable source of useful advice and insights — and advantages accrue for students and alums!” Shaikh continues. “The connections come about by virtue of a shared experience at Newcomb and can influence life and career experiences/pursuits.”

As Shaikh was finishing her own internship, she put Jennifer Stowe (NC '95) in touch with Courington. Stowe was poised to graduate and, like many graduates, was uncertain what the future held. Stowe served as a paralegal before attending graduate school in Arizona. She returned to New Orleans and continued working with Courington, rising from paralegal to administrator and developing a lifelong friendship along the way.

“Kaye encouraged a life/work balance by providing flexibility in schedules and work-from-home opportunities well before that became a common thing during Covid,” says Stowe. “Whether an employee was undergoing chemo for breast cancer, having a baby, or going through a terrible divorce, Kaye always demonstrated an understanding and generosity that you don't see in a lot of workplaces.”

Stowe would later go on to attain her Master of Social Work degree and become a clinical therapist. Throughout, she had the unflagging support of Courington. “She has encouraged my career and life choices and been one of my biggest cheerleaders as well as one of my greatest inspirations while I have negotiated the ups and downs of life,” reflects Stowe.

Building up the Newcomb network by supporting fellow alumnae is second nature to Courington.

“If you are fortunate enough to have a solid career and you can reach out to the people on the ladder a few rungs younger than you and you can help pull them up, why wouldn't you do that? It is so satisfying; it helps everybody, and it makes the world a better place,” says Courington.