

2024 ACC Top 10 30-Somethings: Kimberley K. Odums

Interviews and Profiles



The ACC Top 10 30-Somethings awards recognize in-house counsel between the ages of 30 and 39 for their innovation, approach to challenges, well-rounded perspectives, contributions to the in-house community, and pro bono and volunteer work.



Kimberley K. Odums serves as senior counsel for intellectual property and artificial intelligence at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), where she navigates the legal complexities

spawned by cutting-edge AI technology, while balancing the need for robust IP protection with the push for open innovation. How'd she get here? "As with most things, I raised my hand and asked!" she explains.

Natural curiosity leads to a natural fit

Kimberley is not an engineer nor a data scientist, but she is very curious. She started her career at a regional law firm in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, near her law school alma mater. Initially a litigator and employment attorney, she was lured to Boston by a large firm. Employment litigation was a heavy burden; she often found herself thinking about cases late at night, long after she left her office. Leaning into her natural curiosity, she decided to pivot and explore other legal subject matters, including intellectual property and non-profit practice. During the pandemic she continued her pivot opening her own national IP and brand protection boutique law firm that allowed her to do meaningful legal work at her own pace while raising two young children.

A random encounter with a LinkedIn recruiter led her to IEEE and back to Corporate America. "Owning my own firm stretched me in a lot of ways and revitalized my waning passion for the law. So when the opportunity at IEEE presented itself, I was prepared, both mentally and professionally, to jump back into the corporate workspace."

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When she started at IEEE, she was on a temporary contract with the Commercial Affairs team. For years, she had been reading up on artificial intelligence and recently heard a lot of buzz about GenAI, such as ChatGPT. She shared what she had learned with her immediate team and continued tracking relevant AI-related news. After recognizing the rapid growth and related legal implications of AI, Kimberley went to the organization's general counsel to ask if she could track AI developments, noting it could have a tremendous impact on the company's global intellectual property portfolio.

Saying yes to AI (but with guardrails)

Two years and two promotions later, she is an inaugural member of IEEE's AI Governance Committee and is responsible for vetting the legal aspects of artificial intelligence initiatives that her company pursues. She evaluates both in-house and third-party AI technologies, ensuring that IEEE remains at the forefront of AI technology while also evaluating risks.

While Kimberley is a staunch proponent of AI, she is also responsible for protecting IEEE's global IP portfolio, which includes significant copyright assets that may be impacted by AI's explosive growth. To navigate that tension, she comes up with innovative solutions that promote safe AI use. "I always tell our clients that Legal is not the department of "no," we're the department of "*yes, you can use this technology but here are the guardrails we need to incorporate so that we do things safely*."

Kimberley recently earned the inaugural AI Governance Professional certification issued by the International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP) — making her one of the first people in the world to be a certified AI Governance Professional. The AIGP credential demonstrates that an

individual can ensure safety and trust in the development and deployment of ethical AI and ongoing management of AI systems.

Kimberley shares her knowledge and love for AI by engaging in educational talks. At IEEE's inaugural AI Day event, Kimberley was a keynote presenter, where she simplified complex legal concepts into digestible insights for her colleagues. She is slated to present at several other talks at various events throughout the remainder of 2024.

Helping others

Of all IP attorneys, only 1.8 percent are African American, Kimberley notes. It has given her a unique perspective on how to increase DEI in corporate legal departments. "Like attracts like — there's no innate way to fix it," she says. "You must deliberately engage with folks who are unlike you; the results may surprise you."

She's sincere about being deliberate. The best way to better the profession is to be active. From 2016 to 2021, she sat on the board of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association, an organization dedicated to fostering diversity within the legal profession . Before that, she served on the Executive Board of a similar Connecticut based organization, the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association, advocating for policy changes to help vulnerable communities. She is currently Finance Secretary for the Norfolk-Plymouth County Area Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, a national social action organization dedicated to public service, where she aids in the creation and execution of community service events like educational programming concerning Black farming, tips for financial health and home buying, or ladies night at local hardware stores where attendees learn home maintenance skills.

Kimberley's blend of legal expertise, innovative thinking, and commitment to social equity makes her a leader who excels not only in her professional duties but also inspires others. She will continue to shape the future of AI in the legal domain, ensuring progress and ethical practices go hand in hand.

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