

The NLJ 500: Climbing Mountains, Cracking Ceilings

The 2019 Women in Law Scorecard has a new firm at No. 1, as others push to recruit and retain women lawyers.

BY XIUMEI DONG

When Frieda Garcia joined Berry Appleman & Leiden about 18 years ago, the immigration firm was much smaller and had fewer female attorneys. Over the years, as the firm quadrupled its size, it has grown into one of the top destinations for female firm leaders.

This year, the San Francisco-based firm sits atop the The National Law Journal's 2019 Women in Law Scorecard.

Garcia, a senior partner in Berry Appleman's San Francisco office, said seeing female attorneys in leadership roles is one of the biggest changes she's noticed at the firm since she joined: "More women have grown through the ranks and are now in the partnership position, more so than men."

The Women in Law Scorecard rankings are calculated by adding each firm's percentage of total lawyers who are women with the percentage of partners who are women.

At Berry Appleman, which reported having 142 lawyers in 2018 in data submitted to The National Law Journal, 59.2% of them are women. And women accounted for 60% of the total partnership and 57.8% of associates at the firm.

This year, 271 of the nation's 350 largest law firms by head count answered the survey for the Women



Frieda Garcia, partner with Berry Appleman & Leiden.

in Law Scorecard, which ranks the nation's largest law firms by representation of women attorneys. (Berry Appleman was not included in the Scorecard rankings last year because the firm was outside the top 350 of the NLJ 500 based on 2017 lawyer head count.) Among all 271 firms surveyed, women comprised 36.5% of 141,466 attorneys in 2018. But the equity partnership ranks were only 23.5% women, out of 59,000 total partners. Women comprised 47% of the 67,166 associates at all 271 firms.

A Push for Gender Diversity

Firms best known for practices that have traditionally attracted more women lawyers—namely, immigration and labor and employment—

remained leaders on the Women's Scorecard. But other firms, particularly some on the Am Law 200, are angling to climb up the list by diversifying lateral searches for partners.

"Over the last couple of years, and each year more so than the year previous, most of my cli-



Avis Caravello, with Avis Caravello Attorney Search Consultants.

ents—firms in the Am Law 100, Am Law 200—are very specific when they're conducting lateral partner searches that they want me to focus on finding the female or minority partner candidates," said Avis Caravello, who has run her legal recruiting firm for 30 years.

She added, "awareness of the number of female partners is becoming more of a focus each year for firms," and that is largely a result of client requests.

Tracking the numbers for women at law firms can contribute to meaningful improvement in representation, said Jeremy Fudge, Berry Appleman's Dallas-

based managing partner, who has been leading the firm since 2013. "The great thing about competitions and competitors is, if you are approaching it correctly, then it is making you better," he said.

Berry Appleman has been deliberately growing the firm's female and diversity attorney head counts, in part to compete with peers, Fudge said. Part of that stems from changes the firm has made to internal policies to cut down on lawyer attrition more broadly, like allowing for remote work and flexible work schedules.

In addition to the changes aimed at improving diversity, Berry Appleman's primary focus as an immigration law firm helps, as the practice historically tends to attract more women attorneys.

Last year's leader, New York-based immigration boutique Fragomen held a seven-year streak atop the list—and holds the No. 2 spot this year. The firm reported that women made up 65.2% of its 582 lawyers in 2018 and that women accounted for 51% of partners. Additionally, 69.5% of associates at the firm are women.

Regardless of gender, "the immigration area is very conducive to attracting people who want to help others," said Carmita Alonso, a Fragomen partner and executive committee member. "We deal with cultural differences and ethnic differences, different groups, from different countries." After Berry Appleman and Fragomen,

four of the next five firms on the Women in Law Scorecard focus on labor and employment law: Kubicki Draper at No. 3; FordHarrison at No. 5; Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete at No. 6; and Littler Mendelson at No. 7.

Progress in Big Law

The majority of the top 30 firms on this year's scorecard have a head count of fewer than 300. Exceptions include San Francisco-based Littler Mendelson (No. 7); Greenville, South Carolina-based Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart (No.14); New York-based Jackson Lewis (No.17); and Los Angeles-based Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith (No. 25)—all of which have a strong emphasis on labor and employment. These firms also appeared in the top 30 on last year's list.

In 2018, a number of other large firms boosted their stats on the Women in Law Scorecard. Those that moved up in the ranks place women in leadership roles and foster a pipeline of female and diverse attorneys.

O'Melveny & Myers landed at 68th on the Women in Law Scorecard this year—up from 104th the previous year. In 2018, women made up 40.3% of O'Melveny's 673 lawyers. Women accounted for 21% of equity partners and 45.5% of associates. From 2017 to 2018, the firm's total female partner head count increased by six.

"Our pipeline of women from counsel to partners has been



Mary Ellen Connerty

incredibly strong in the last five years. At least 40% of our partner promotees have been women," said Mary Ellen Connerty, O'Melveny's director of diversity and engagement. "It really speaks to [us having] our eye on these women from a very early stage, up through the years that we bring them to the partnership."

Ropes & Gray, which elected a woman partner as chair for the first time in its more than 150-year history, has moved up to 32nd place on this year's NLJ scorecard, from 36th last year. Julie Jones is set to take over that role when current chair, R. Bradford Malt, retires at the end of 2019.

In 2018, women made up 43.1% of Ropes & Gray's 1,210 lawyers, as well as 26.1% of the equity partners and 45.7% of associates at the firm.

Amanda Morrison, a private equity partner who co-chairs the firm's Women's Forum, said that women attorneys are drawn to Ropes & Gray because they have seen other female leaders succeeding in a variety of practices, and not pigeonholed.

"What is true then and remains true now is that there were women [who] have built really successful, interesting practices across the whole range of practice areas," said Morrison, who has been with the firm for 20 years. "I felt like there was no limit to what area of law I can choose. I really felt like I had the luxury of finding what felt like the best fit for my interest, my skills, my strength."

Among all 271 law firms surveyed, St. Louis-based Thompson Coburn moved up the most on this year's NLJ scorecard, jumping from 190th place to 75th. In 2018, women made up 33% of the firm's 331 lawyers, 24.1% of equity partners and 42.5% of associates at the firm. Four of the seven attorneys that were promoted to partnership last year were women, according to Thompson Coburn partner Laura Jordan, who also chairs the firm's Women's Initiative.

Asked what makes her firm particularly attractive to the women lawyers, Jordan answered, "critical mass."

"When I started, I looked for



Amanda Morrison of Ropes & Gray.

other women that I wanted to emulate," Jordan added. "So, being here, and investing, and showing the path of how to practice law in a very vigorous profession—and that it's an achievable goal—is important." Over the last decade, Women's Initiative programming has become much more business-focused at the firm, aimed at involving female attorneys in corporate and strategic developments, she said.

It's "not just about bringing women into the firm, but keeping them here," Jordan said. "And that means we are seeing women who started as associates getting promoted as partners because we have done a better job at keeping them."

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