

Tulane student embraces second chance at life as leader in law school

October 18, 2023 11:03 AM Alina Hernandez
ahernandez4@tulane.edu



Third-year law student Lakshmi “Lex” Kumar, who was diagnosed with a rare congenital heart condition years ago, has been awarded a prestigious scholarship from the nation’s leading organization of defense trial lawyers, the Defense Research Institute. The diagnosis, surprisingly, Kumar said, led her to law school. (Photo provided)

Tulane Law student Lakshmi “Lex” Kumar has embraced her second chance at life.

Just a few years from a diagnosis of a rare congenital heart condition that could have taken her life, she is among the law school's most avid student scholars and leaders.

"Second chances are rarely given," said Kumar (L'24). "My doctor (appropriately named Barry Love) told me that I was one in a million – my diagnosis was that rare. I know I am incredibly fortunate to get a second chance."

Kumar's many law school leadership titles are extensive. This year, she serves as the 2023-24 Tulane Moot Court Black Law Student Association (BLSA) Chair, and a Notes and Comments Editor for the Tulane Maritime Law Journal. She also is a judicial extern for Judge Susie Morgan of the Eastern District of Louisiana.

This summer, she added another honor to her extensive list of accomplishments.

She has been awarded a prestigious \$5,000 scholarship from the nation's leading organization of defense trial lawyers, the Defense Research Institute (DRI), a national organization of more than 22,000 defense trial lawyers and corporate counsel.

In awarding Kumar the DRI Law Student Diversity Scholarship this summer, the organization will also fly her to San Antonio, Texas, this month to attend their national conference.

Tulane Law Dean for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Tracie Ransom called Kumar an "impactful student-leader" and a standout among her peers in her recommendation letter.

"Lex is a first-generation and second-career law student who has continued her track record of success across multiple industries as a student here at TLS," Dean Ransom wrote. "She is a student who brings a global perspective to her work and conversations — inside and outside the classroom."

"The cultural humility and competence she displays when engaging with others make it easy for Lex to forge bonds and relationships across difference," Dean Ransom continued. "She does not hesitate to use her legal talents, skills and training to advocate for the underserved and marginalized in our society."

A third-year law student, Kumar was born and raised in New York. She arrived at Tulane Law from Portland, Oregon, after receiving her undergrad from Boston University and master's degrees in media studies and arts and politics from The New

School in New York and Goldsmiths College of the University of London in the United Kingdom.

Before entering law school, she worked in the arts, media and publishing. Then, life was interrupted. In October 2015, an unexpected health scare turned her life upside down.

Her cardiologist explained she had a rare congenital heart condition called Scimitar Syndrome, made even rarer by its symptom-free discovery in adulthood. This diagnosis, surprisingly, she said, led her to law school. She had open-heart surgery to address her condition and as she recovered, she said, “I stopped and took a serious look at what I wanted for my future.”

She loved writing about art, yet she found herself devouring legal news and Supreme Court decisions in her free time, debating court rulings with friends, volunteering in political organizations, and heading to immigration court to accompany those fighting deportation.

“It was clear this was my second chance,” she said. “The diagnosis made me reconsider my place in the world.”

She arrived at Tulane Law with gusto. In her two years of law school, she has served as Vice President of the International Law Society, Co-Chair of BLSA’s Political Action Committee, Intersectionality Chair for the Environmental and Energy Law Society, and a law clerk with the Tulane Legal Assistance Program (TULAP). A Research Fellow for Tulane’s Utility Vegetation Management Initiative, Kumar has been asked to present papers at two national conferences.

She is also a research assistant to iconic law professors Robert Westley and Oliver Houck, a member of the Inn of Court, and the Maritime Law Journal will be publishing two of her pieces — a comment and a case note. She also competed with — and coaches — the BLSA Thurgood Marshall Appellate Moot Court Team. Kumar also advances the cause of social justice through her involvement with the New Orleans Promise of Justice Initiative, where she devotes her time and efforts to the organization’s Non-Unanimous Jury Project and its End Plantation Prisons Initiative.

Additionally, Kumar has been recognized for her classroom excellence through a series of honors including receiving the Tulane Law Faculty and Hale Boggs Endowed Scholarships, the 2023 Porter Hedges Diversity Fellowship and the 2023 Federal Bar

Association's McNew Law Student Scholarship.