

Teacher turned law school grad finds fulfillment in helping others

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Law school graduate Ricky Bordelon looks forward to utilizing the mentorship skills he learned as a teacher after he takes the bar exam in July.

Even as a child, Ricky Bordelon knew that he wanted to be a teacher. He always loved school and eventually ended up teaching advanced placement U.S. government, civics and psychology at the Academy of the Sacred Heart School in New Orleans for four years.

But the COVID-19 pandemic pushed him to reflect on whether he wanted to continue teaching. It was a difficult time, he said, with the pandemic forcing schools to temporarily close or offer classes online to limit exposure to the virus.

“I was about to turn 30, and I knew I was teaching the subjects I enjoyed teaching but also knew I wanted to do something new,” he said.

In particular, he was interested in teaching civil rights and liberties. Part of the U.S. government curriculum he taught at Sacred Heart included a section on constitutional law.

“I would teach those cases to students. It always interested me, but I also thought I could do this. I wanted to litigate these issues and fight for people’s rights that have been denied them,” he said. “That’s when I thought I could go to law school.”

Bordelon was accepted to Tulane Law School, and he developed an interest in criminal defense work. Before attending Tulane, Bordelon, born and raised in New Orleans, did his undergraduate work at Fordham University where he majored in history and political science. He minored in German and received a Fullbright grant to teach English in Germany for a year. He earned a master’s degree from Georgetown University in German and European Studies before becoming a teacher.

“It’s kind of funny; my parents are both attorneys, and I swore off law school for years,” he said.

At Tulane Law School, Bordelon became a Harris fellow and worked as a mentor for first-year law students, helping them navigate the program and answering their questions about New Orleans. Mentorship was also one of his favorite parts of being a teacher, and Bordelon reflected on similarities between the teaching and law professions.

“The legal profession is at its best when people are willing to help each other. If I can

give back in any way, I hope to be able to do that,” he said.

He credits mentors including Federal Public Defender Claude Kelly, attorney Thomas Flanagan, and Tulane law professors Sally Richardson and Vanessa Beary for their support through school.

After Bordelon takes the bar exam in July, he will clerk for Judge Wendy Vitter at the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana for a year. The following year he will move on to clerk for Judge Dana Douglas on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

His goal is to eventually work in the area of federal criminal defense.

Bordelon looked back on his journey from being a teacher to starting a career in law.

“It is a leap of faith and a bet on yourself, but I have enjoyed every minute of it. I am nothing but excited for the future and for my practice,” he said.