

Hearsay

henriette.campagne@lawyersweekly.com

More bang for the buck

It all started with a humor column in a bar association publication about ways to relax while waiting for bar exam results. The piece resonated with Jessica L. Conklin, so she decided to invite the author, Hannah T. Joseph, a fellow Boston College Law School alum, to coffee.



CONKLIN

Before the two Boston associates knew it, they were bonding over their shared experience of working at a boutique law firm, both



JOSEPH

grateful for the variety of work and opportunity for informal interactions with partners. But they also lamented that their big-firm peers had a benefit unavailable to them: a ready-made group of other associates with whom to discuss legal issues and form social ties.

So Conklin and Joseph decided to replicate the connection they had made with each other on a larger scale. Earlier this year, they formally launched the Boston Associates' Networking Group — or BANG — for associates at small and midsize firms and in-house legal departments.

"When you're in a room or on a floor with 15 to 20 other associates, there's a word-of-mouth information exchange that happens naturally. We're trying to re-create that," says Joseph, who practices at Beck, Reed, Riden.

The group, which now includes some three dozen members from about 30 firms and companies, meets for a monthly lunch sponsored by one of the members' firms. The willingness of those firms to host BANG "speaks volumes" about their support, according to Joseph.

"They realize that an important part of practicing law in Boston is engaging in the legal community," she says.

Joseph's firm supports the group because it helps small-firm associates get some of the collegiality they typically miss out on, says partner Russell Beck. That in turn helps the firm, which wants its lawyers to feel fulfilled in their professional lives, he says.

At other times throughout the month, groups of

three BANG members get together for lunch or drinks so that they can make personal connections with other members, says Joseph, who recently met up with an attorney who is clerking and another who does corporate transactional work. That gave her a window into what it's like to work in those jobs and focus on those specialties.

"The next time I have a substantive question, I'll probably reach out to someone I've already met [through BANG]," she says.

The organization also posts a calendar of events in the legal community, with BANG members buddying up to attend outside programs.

"It can be intimidating to show up to a large event alone," says Conklin, an associate at Laredo & Smith.

— SHERI QUALTERS

Gordon's Gordian knot

Even if a North Shore college with "roots in the Christian faith" ultimately prevails in a faculty member's civil rights lawsuit, it may have some fence mending to do.

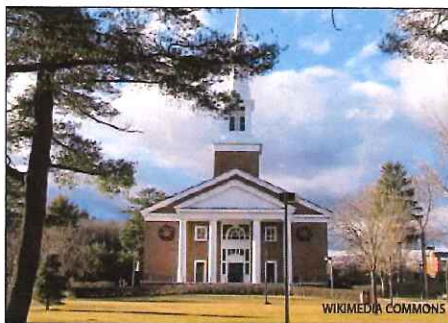
Tenured philosophy professor Lauren Barthold claims Gordon College retaliated against her for publicly disagreeing with the decision of the school's president, D. Michael Lindsay, to sign a letter in July 2014 urging President Obama to create a religious exception to an executive order prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in hiring.

Lindsay's action drew a swift response, including an online petition, which quickly gathered almost 4,000 signatures, and the cancellation of the city of Salem's contract with the school to manage its "Old Town Hall." Hamilton-Wenham also decided to move its high school graduation off the college campus.

Barthold added her voice to the discussion through a July 11, 2014, letter to the editor of the Salem News and a September 2014 interview with a Boston Globe reporter.

In the letter, Barthold expressed a mixture of "sadness and relief" at having her employer's policy on hiring practices "outed," adding "it behooves us to win back the trust" of the local community and "our spiritual community of LGBTQ Christians."

In the Globe article, Barthold chided the administration for failing to foster "more robust and true, honest dialogue with the faculty."



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

In the months ahead, Barthold would receive a letter of reprimand from Gordon's board of trustees, along with a proposed agreement to resign, which she refused to sign.

While the administration would abandon efforts to get Barthold to leave, it found other ways to punish her, according to her complaint. She was removed from faculty leadership positions, denied the right to apply for a promotion as scheduled, and removed as director of the school's gender studies minor. Such consequences did not befall male professors who were similarly critical of Gordon, the complaint adds.

ACLU of Massachusetts Deputy Legal Director Sarah



WUNSCH

R. Wunsch, who has joined Boston attorney Joshua L. Solomon in representing Barthold, says that

Barthold generally supports the role faith plays on Gordon's campus.

"But that doesn't mean she would accept being in a situation in which discussion is being shut down," she says. The complaint, filed in Essex Superior Court, claims Gordon unlawfully discriminated against Barthold in violation of G.L.c. 151B and also interfered with her rights of freedom of expression and association.

The legal battle may hinge on the nature of Barthold's role on Gordon's campus. Her complaint stresses that she is not a minister. Indeed, Wunsch notes that Barthold had previously served as a campus minister and came to Gordon in part to relinquish responsibility for fostering spiritual growth.

However, Rick Sweeney, Gordon's vice president of marketing and communications, counters that the ACLU is muddying the waters about the nature of its campus and workforce, as well as Barthold's role.

"The integration of faith

and learning is foundational to the college," he says.

Gordon faculty members, he adds, "are expected to be fully prepared in all facets of their tasks as Christian teachers and advisors."

Sweeney says the decision to discipline Barthold "was driven by her written and other public statements in which professor Barthold identified herself as a Gordon employee and expressed her strong disagreements with the college in a harmful way at a time when Gordon was under adverse negative scrutiny."

He declines further comment but suggests the forthcoming litigation would more fully illuminate the college's position.

Wunsch says there's a sad irony to the school punishing Barthold "for causing public disapproval," given that Lindsay tried to distance the school from an action he says he took as a private citizen.

"They're attributing harm from Lauren's speech but trying to avoid any consequences from their own," she says.

Solomon and Wunsch believe they are fighting an important battle to preserve academic freedom and prevent discrimination and retaliation in the workplace in the name of religion.

"The ACLU of Massachusetts cares about both religious freedom and the right to speak out against discrimination," Wunsch says. "But religious freedom does not mean the freedom to do anything to others in the name of religion."

Wunsch likens Barthold to now-former Wheaton College professor Larycia Hawkins, who was nearly fired and agreed to leave the Illinois Christian school after writing a Facebook post suggesting Christians and Muslims worship the same God. She also donned a hijab as a show of solidarity with Muslims.

— KRIS OLSON

Multiple counts

Vault recently released its 2016 national rankings of the "Best Law Firms for Diversity." Boston was again well represented on the list, as firms with offices in the Hub placed in the top 25 in five separate categories. The Boston field was led once again by Ropes & Gray and Littler Mendelson, while WilmerHale made a strong showing as the only other firm to chart in every diversity category.

2016	2015	
OVERALL		
3	1	Ropes & Gray
5	2	Littler Mendelson
13	NR	WilmerHale
22	22	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom
23	23	Weil, Gotshal & Manges
25	NR	Sidley Austin
MINORITIES		
4	1	Littler Mendelson
5	3	Ropes & Gray
19	NR	WilmerHale
24	NR	Fish & Richardson
25	21	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom
LGBT INDIVIDUALS		
2	2	Ropes & Gray
6	1	Foley Hoag
8	4	Littler Mendelson
15	24	WilmerHale
WOMEN		
3	5	Ropes & Gray
7	2	Littler Mendelson
18	NR	WilmerHale
23	23	Sidley Austin
INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES		
3	1	Ropes & Gray
4	3	Littler Mendelson
11	NR	WilmerHale
20	21	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom
22	NR	Fish & Richardson
23	NR	Sidley Austin