



Dr. Kimberly McManus

Written by Tam Pham, M.Sc. Trainee



I was given the opportunity to interview Dr. Kimberly McManus who is currently a patent agent for Aird & McBurney LP located in Toronto, ON. She was the first person that I interviewed ever since my entrance to the CREATE program this February. We had an interesting conversation about her graduate school experience at Dalhousie University, a few post-doc transitions and her journey to becoming a patent agent.

Q: What was your experience like in graduate school?

A: Looking back at it, I had a great experience. During my time at Dal, I was fortunate enough to work with two excellent chemistry professors in the area of photochemistry: Dr. James Pincock and Dr. Donald Arnold (Ph.D. Supervisor). At the time, I do not think I really appreciated how lucky I was to be doing research with such a great group of graduate students and professors. One of the best things about graduate research, and research in general, are those eureka moments. I know that sometimes those moments can be few and far between but when you have that moment, there is nothing like it.

Q: What was the most challenging thing of being a post-doc/grad student?

A: For me, it would have to be pushing myself outside my comfort zone. I was not a big fan of public speaking and you have to, of course, present on your research (e.g. internal meetings, conferences, teaching, etc.) during graduate school. You just have to make yourself do it, practice a lot, and do it as often as you can. Another challenge was the lab environment itself.



We had a pretty big group, so you had to be mindful and respectful of each other's workspace, different personalities, and cultures. Once I graduated with my Ph.D., I was given the opportunity to do post-docs in the UK and in the US. It was difficult for me to leave Halifax and my family, but it was the best experience both professionally and personally. My advice to potential graduate students/post-docs is to get outside your comfort zone and take a chance, because you never know where it may take you.

Q: To follow-up for the previous question, how did you find ways to solve or cope with the challenges as a grad student?

A: To be honest, with respect to the lab environment, sometimes it was just "trial and error". You will be/are spending many hours in the lab and you have to appreciate that people work differently. All I can really suggest is to try to compromise and find a middle ground if you are having difficulties. For the more experienced graduate students (e.g. mentors), you are the example for the less experienced graduate students. Try to be a good role model and teacher/trainer for them. Take the time to explain procedures/rules and instrumentation so that they use, for example, the equipment properly and are able to pass that information onto the next group of graduate students joining the lab.

Q: How was your journey from a chemist to a patent agent like?

A: I was doing a post-doc at the University of Rochester, NY. A fellow post-doc mentioned that law/patent agency firms in Canada were looking for scientists to train to become patent agents. I then contacted a Toronto patent agency firm to find out more information about becoming a patent agent. This firm happened to be recruiting for a patent agent trainee with a chemical background and they ended up hiring me. I trained with them for two years and wrote and passed the patent agent exams. So that was how I became a patent agent. Looking back at everything, it was all very fluky, and I am really, really glad that I took the post-doc position at the University of Rochester.



Q: What was your first day at the law firm like and what was your favourite thing about your job?

A: There was a bit of a culture shock going from the lab environment to an office environment, but the biggest shock was my knowledge base. I went from a reasonably high level of knowledge in chemistry to knowing next to nothing about patents. In a way, I felt like I was back at square one. It was very disconcerting. Nevertheless, the firm trained me well and I learned how to draft and prosecute patent applications. One of the favourite things about my job is figuring out how best to describe and claim an invention. It is just like a puzzle and when I figure it out, it is almost like (but not quite) that eureka moment that I had in research. Also, I really enjoy working with our staff, the professionals, and our clients.

Q: What are the biggest sources of stress in your job and what do you do to stay stress-free?

A: I suppose for a patent agent the biggest source of stress would be deadlines. There are numerous deadlines that we have to meet to maintain a patent application/patent in good standing. Sometimes these deadlines are quite tight and can entail numerous hours of work to meet the deadline. You just have to be organized and on top of the deadlines to do your job properly- and it also helps when you have great staff to work with. To stay stress-free, I like to make "to do" lists. I find that helps. If I am really stressed, I try to speak with a co-worker, friend or family member. They usually help to put things into perspective. In addition, and although I have difficulty doing it myself sometimes, exercise. It really does help!