



# Aida Alaka

## Faculty

Aida Alaka's outlook on life could be summed up in two sentences. "It is never too late to try something new," and "Take a lesson from each new experience and constantly try to grow as a professional and a person."

Ten years after receiving her B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1981 and working in a job that she felt lacked potential, growth and no longer challenged her, Alaka made the decision to attend law school. "Law seemed to be a field where I could use my strengths in a way that might make a difference in someone else's life, and I was sure that I would never be bored," said Alaka.

Alaka was concerned about leaving her job, returning to school, and graduating in her late thirties. Her supervisor encouraged her to attend law school, telling her she would reach her late thirties whether she went to law school or not. "That thought has always stayed with me. I learned it is never too late to try something new," claims Alaka.

From the beginning, Alaka had role models who shaped her interest in writing and law. Both of her parents were students who returned to school later in life and who valued education. Alaka's high school English teacher influenced her as well. "I continually sparred with my English teacher. He would probably be surprised to know this, but I enjoyed preparing to argue with him. On some level, that experience influenced my decision to litigate."

Alaka received her J.D. from Loyola University Chicago in 1993. During law school, she was editor-in-chief of the *Loyola University Law Journal* and a staff writer for the *Loyola University Consumer Law Reporter*.

After law school, Alaka's practice focused first on commercial litigation then on employment law. "I was drawn to the complexity of employment law and its ever shifting terrain of conflict over questions of fairness, discrimination, harassment, exploitation and a host of other issues," she said. "The big societal questions of race, ethnicity, gender quality and age are bound up with these issues."

Alaka was an associate in the firm of Holleb & Coff, in Chicago, from 1993 to 1997 then moved to the firm of Winston & Strawn from 1997 to 2003. In 2001 she became a partner in that firm. While at Winston & Strawn she was seconded to the corporate law department as in house counsel to Sears Roebuck and Company from 1999 to 2000.

When Alaka's husband's job brought her to Kansas, she once again decided it wasn't too late to try something new.

"Because I enjoyed the counseling and training part of my practice, I wanted to obtain a teaching position." The skills she honed in training clients on legal compliance by communicating legal concepts to those who were not lawyers, along with practicing law in a large firm, gave Alaka a grounded and practical approach to teaching.

Alaka first taught as a lecturer at the University of Kansas teaching a section of legal writing and a course on race and the law. "I was thrilled when a teaching opportunity eventually led me to Washburn," said Alaka. She joined Washburn Law in 2005 as an associate professor of law teaching Legal Analysis, Research & Writing and Employment Law.

Alaka hopes to be a positive influence on her students, "I hope to help develop prepared, ethical and caring professionals." She especially likes the commitment that Washburn Law has to student success and she wants to continue to build on the positive reputation of the law school.

Most of the satisfaction Alaka receives is from seeing the growth in her students as they learn and improve on their research and writing skills. Alaka said, "I also find it satisfying to grow as a teacher. Every time I teach class, I learn something new. Teaching, like being a student, is a process of discovery." She expects to become more active in the academic field of legal research and writing. "It is important to stay current in the law, whether through practice or writing. Developing scholarship is therefore a very important aspect of my job," said Alaka.

"I'm passionate about fairness and respect in the workplace and other life arenas, especially as it relates to the historic experience of groups affected by discrimination," said Alaka. Coming from a multi-cultural family, she appreciates cultural differences. "I think it is important for all students, and law students in particular, to travel abroad at some time. Being a foreigner or an 'outsider' gives one a real appreciation for the experiences of the people who immigrate to this country; whether those people are our classmates, our parents, our neighbors, our clients or just people we see while grocery shopping. No matter where one will practice law, it is important to understand the enormous and wonderful diversity of human experience," states Alaka.

Through her life experiences and her own positive and enthusiastic outlook on life, Alaka lives what she believes. "Life is too short to be dissatisfied. It is never too late to try something new, have an open mind and always be willing to learn." Her final words, "Figure out what you really want to do and then do it. Be active participants in your own lives."