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Delida Costin '91 brings her passion for history to law, technology and business

BY DANIEL P. SMITH



Delida Costin can trace a lifetime of personal and professional curiosity to a discussion about a mug.

Her history professor Karen Halttunen was explaining why mugs in Colonial America had three handles. In households with limited resources, Halttunen told the class, several people used a single mug to share hot drinks.

"It blew my mind," says Costin, who had only lived in a world of single-handled mugs and had never questioned otherwise. "Just because something looks as it does today doesn't mean that's what it was yesterday or what it might be tomorrow."

Until that point, Costin had equated the study of history with the memorization of facts and people. But Halttunen's lecture had opened her eyes to something else, something more powerful: how history has shaped the present and the future.

"All of the sudden, things made sense to me," Costin said. "History became a way of connecting dots and better understanding the world around me."

A deeper curiosity ignited within Costin. She decided to major in history, and then to pursue a degree in law, a field that draws heavily on historical precedents. Her career since then has bridged her fascination with the past with the promise of the future, leading her to pivotal roles at iconic technology firms such as lynda.com and Pandora Media Inc.

Costin's work — spearheading Pandora's 2011 IPO, crafting strategic partnerships and navigating the legal issues involved in managing risk and growth — would hardly seem to overlap with the concerns of the original owners of that three-handled mug.

But that's only if you aren't a student of history. "Copyright-law dialogue, for example, was actually set up during the Constitutional Convention in 1787," notes Costin. "It is a delicate balance between 'we the people,' who want to consume music, and the copyright owners, who have an interest in being paid."

In 2015, Costin stepped down as general counsel of lynda.com following LinkedIn's purchase of the online education company. As she considers her next move, she is particularly excited by the opportunities being created in fields such as robotics, healthcare and energy. "I can't tell you what the world will look like in 2026, but I know I want to be a part of a movement that has a positive impact on people," Costin says.

Her understanding of the past will no doubt inform her plans for the future.

"The best decisions come from experience — understanding how systems work and how they react to different catalysts," Costin says. "It's hard to get from point A to point B if you don't understand what came before A."

What did you do with your arts and sciences degree? [Join the discussion.](#)