Sisters Rika Yano, JD ‘96, and Rina Yano, JD ‘98, credit their law school education with opening doors into fields that have become a perfect match for each of them. In their positions as director of Deutsche Securities Inc. and in-house counsel at Roll International Corporation, both sisters relish the daily intellectual and creative challenges of their jobs—whether handling options on the trading floor or helping produce commercials for pistachios.
A LUMNAE RIKI YANO AND RINA YANO followed similar paths while growing up in Japan and the United States, attending the same law school, and working for a law firm upon graduation—but their current careers in entertainment/corporate law and international securities demonstrate the diversity of the opportunities Washington University helped put within their reach.

As Japanese-Americans, the two believe their careers illustrate a point they would like to make to minority women interested in pursuing law: despite tough economic times, many interesting career options are available to law graduates.

“I hope that incoming students at Washington University can see that there are lots of career choices out there and that they will be able to broaden their horizons,” Rina Yano says.

Rika Yano echoes her younger sister: “I definitely deviated from the traditional law firm track,” she says. “A legal education just opens so many avenues and career opportunities. And with my language skills, I’ve been able to create my own niche, which has been challenging, but also fun.”

Recently, Rina enjoyed putting her talents and skills to the test while producing eight television commercials for Roll International’s Los Angeles pistachio product.

“First I reviewed the scripts to make sure that there was no copyright infringement,” she recalls. “The second aspect was to hire all the celebrities for the spots and negotiate terms with each of their agents. I also obtained licenses for the music we used.”

Additionally, she attended each of the commercial shoots to ensure that her client’s interests were protected. “I had to make sure they weren’t doing anything that would get us in trouble, such as if the costumes or something in the background had infringed on someone else’s intellectual property rights.”

The project involved a myriad of details, but when it was finally completed, Rina notes that “the rewarding aspect was seeing the commercials on the air.”

Rina works on legal issues for Roll’s various companies, including a bottled water company and a floral wire service. The corporation’s holdings also include three farms—the one that grows nuts, as well as one that produces oranges and lemons, and one that grows pomegranates.

While Rina enjoys contract law, particularly entertainment matters, her sister, Rika, oversees the business management of the Global Markets division which handles sales and trading of securities at Deutsche. She recently relocated to New York from Tokyo when her husband, Jeff Olson, a mergers and acquisitions lawyer, was transferred there by his firm.

Both sisters have employed not only legal and business skills, but also their fluency in Japanese. The two learned Japanese when their family lived in Tokyo from 1971 to 1976, before returning to the United States for the rest of elementary school and high school. Rika graduated from Duke University in 1993, and Rina earned a degree from Scripps College in Claremont, California in 1995.

Rika was a third-year law student at Washington University, when Rina enrolled as a first year. The older sister helped her younger sister get acclimated, and the two lived together in an off-campus apartment. Rika also shared her class notes with Rina, along with observations on courses and professors.

When Rika graduated, she joined Bryan Cave LLP in St. Louis. But she recalls wanting to “leverage” her Japanese fluency. So in 1997, she took an in-house legal position at Lehman Brothers and worked two years in Tokyo and another in New York. In 2001, she joined Deutsche’s credit trading desk in Tokyo and began working in structured credit documentation.

“I was helping out with derivatives business when I made the switch to Deutsche Securities,” she says. “I had the opportunity to work side by side with traders on the trading floor. It brought me closer to the action in the ‘front office.’”

The securities assignments in Tokyo were a great fit. “I liked the tempo, the open surroundings,” she says. “I enjoyed working with traders on the floor who had innovative product ideas. All that excitement was alluring.”

Her duties regularly brought her into contact with government regulators, compliance officers, and senior sales representatives and traders. “I had to be constantly aware of all the rules as to what you can do and how you do it on a trading floor,” she says. “If a regulation was amended, I also met with our compliance officers to determine what practices we had to change.”

Like her sister, Rika started her legal career working for law firms. But in 2001, she moved to the entertainment industry at Sony Pictures Digital Inc. in Los Angeles. In 2004, she joined Warner Bros. International Television Distribution Inc., and two years later, Roll hired her.

“I had always loved watching movies and television,” she says. “Naturally, being here in southern California, there are a lot of in-house opportunities in the entertainment field. I always wanted to work for a large corporation. A contract is a contract, but I’d rather work on one related to something I enjoy.”

At Roll, she also draws on her fluency in Japanese. “I was asked to work on various business and legal aspects when we expanded to Japan, including setting up the corporation with our local counsel and making sure that we’re in compliance with regulations when we send our products there.”

She believes that the in-house work is less intense than what she observed at a law firm. “This really has been my favorite working environment,” says Rina, who’s married and has a one-and-a-half-year-old son. “I have great colleagues, a diverse workload, and work that permits me to spend time with my family. I don’t have a story of something at work that I don’t like to do.”