April Southwick '94

Describe your work:
I specialize in advising and defending governmental entities on issues of constitutional law and civil rights. Much of my work involves First Amendment claims, in particular, freedom of speech challenges brought by adult businesses resisting regulations imposed on them by cities. I also draft laws to regulate adult businesses and conduct training with local government officials and law enforcement agencies on the enforcement of those regulations. The most exciting aspect of my work recently has been appellate work. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals hears appeals from federal district courts in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, so when we prevail at the Fifth Circuit, we set important legal precedent for cities all over this region of the country. Over the past year I’ve been working to secure support from the Texas City Attorneys’ Association to sponsor several nationally renowned experts and scholars in conducting a study on the harmful secondary effects caused by certain types of adult businesses. The study, which will be complete by the end of this year, will serve as a valuable tool to cities and counties across the country that are seeking to regulate these types of businesses.

What is commonly misunderstood about your work?
Citizens regularly voice that, by regulating adult businesses, the city is approving of the messages the businesses convey. It’s very difficult to explain that, although some messages may run afoul of the citizen’s own moral or religious beliefs, it’s still speech that is protected under the First Amendment. It’s also very challenging to make citizens and elected officials understand that if they adopt laws that infringe on the First Amendment, the laws will be struck down by the court, leaving their community with no regulations.