

Preparing the Soil: Pipeline Projects Require Knowledge of Student Development

Encouraging adolescents to consider law as a career is not always as simple as describing the intellectual, financial, and humanistic rewards of the profession.

Many of today's minority lawyers were the first in their families to go to college. Some had to find their own ways through the college admission and financing process, the Student Achievement Tests and Law SATs, the hard work that college and law school entail, networking and interviewing to land first jobs, and the politics of practicing and progressing in those jobs.

Programs such as Street Law Inc.'s Legal Diversity Pipeline Project are based on research about the best ways to approach students at different developmental stages.

Street Law's prospectus for the program's pilot summarizes research about what has to be addressed if a law firm wants to convince high schoolers that law is an achievable and desirable profession.

One of the most important attributes students must master is self-efficacy—the concept that they are capable of developing skills and support necessary to pursue a legal career. They also need social competency and work readiness skills, such as the abilities to form interpersonal relationships with people of diverse backgrounds, take leadership, dress appropriately, and follow workplace rules that govern attendance and punctuality.

Good programs to motivate students can be labor-intensive for the mentors—the programs require individuals and law firms to dedicate time and sometimes other resources to an ongoing relationship with promising students. Educators have developed proven strategies for helping students attain these skills.

For more information on Street Law pipeline projects, contact Lee Arbetman at LArbetman@streetlaw.org

VBA Diversity Job Fair

The Virginia Bar Association's Second Annual Diversity Job Fair, held August 16 in Richmond, drew twenty-three Virginia legal employers, who interviewed more than one hundred law students from as far away as Utah.

The VBA Young Lawyers Division, which sponsored the fair, made improvements to the project since the first fair, said Dana A. Dews, one of five cochairs of the project.

They expanded the list of participating employers to include not only Virginia's largest law firms, but also public-interest projects such as the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia, legal aid programs, and the U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps. (Details are available at the Diversity Job Fair website, <http://www.vba.org/diversityjobfair.htm>.)

They advertised the fair to students nationally because Virginia law firms reported in a preliminary poll that "we are not seeing a lot of diverse candidates in our on-campus interviews at the schools," Dews said. The organizers did not attempt to define who is a minority, but invited "anybody who thinks they're a diverse candidate."

From the student résumés, each employer could preselect up to thirteen students, and the organizers assigned five others by lottery. Previously, selection had been entirely by lottery—a practice that neither students nor employers liked.

The project requires almost a year of planning, Dews said. Five VBA cochairs worked with the Richmond Legal



L–R: Monica McCarroll, Dana A. Dews, Elaina L. Blanks, and Karen A. Robinson, four of five cochairs of the VBA's Diversity Job Fair in 2008.

Diversity Alliance—a group of law firm recruitment officers oversaw:

- publicity;
- sponsorships to offset the costs;
- a website for student and employer registration;
- interviews scheduling;
- volunteers and VBA staff who worked at the fair;
- housing and a luncheon sponsored by Williams Mullen.

The VBA does not know yet whether students received callbacks or whether matches were made. The organizers have asked students and employers for feedback.

Dews said the Young Lawyers Division's Minority Recruitment Committee replaced an annual diversity seminar with the job fair after it concluded, "We can't just keep putting on seminars. We need to do something proactive."

The response proved to Dews that law firms are eager to hire diverse associates, and "the diverse candidates are out there, and they want to come to Virginia."