

# Pre-Law Institute, Conference Address Diversity Challenges

by Maya M. Eckstein, 2006–2007 Young Lawyers Conference President



The Young Lawyers Conference has long been concerned about diversity. While the legal profession has become more diverse, the profession does not reflect society's diversity. In 2000, attorneys of color made up less than 15 percent of the profession. Individuals of color made up approximately 30 percent of the U.S. population. (<http://www.abanet.org/yld/chooselaw/diversity.shtml>). There are not enough minority associates, partners, solo practitioners, corporate counsel, government lawyers, or judges.

Our programs address this disparity. The YLC holds an annual prelaw conference for minority college students on preparing for law school; the course addresses the law school experience and explores legal careers. We have Law School Admission Test prep courses, mock law school classes, a mock trial, and panel discussions with the bench, bar and law students. The conference provides valuable information to Virginia college students considering a career in the law. Previously held in Richmond, last year's conference was held at George Mason University and will be there again in spring 2007. Next year the YLC also will hold a conference in Southwest Virginia.

The YLC also annually organizes the Oliver Hill/Samuel L. Tucker Prewal

Institute—a free, one-week overnight camp that targets at-risk high school students and encourages them to consider the legal profession. It gives students the opportunity to meet with lawyers in a variety of legal positions (judges and corporate, government and private lawyers). It also teaches how to conduct opening and closing statements and direct and cross examinations. Students participate in mock trials.

The YLC honors women and minority lawyers recently elevated to the bench at its Celebration Bench/Bar Dinner, during which young lawyers meet judges in a casual atmosphere. The YLC will continue sponsoring this event until the elevation of women and minorities to the bench no longer seems an anomaly.

The YLC will introduce a new Choose Law program developed by the American Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division. The program will be presented in schools across the commonwealth this fiscal year. Like the Oliver Hill/Samuel Tucker Prewal Institute, the Choose Law program encourages minority high school students to become attorneys. It educates them about the legal profession, exposes them to attorneys in different legal careers; emphasizes the importance of law in society; highlights

minority attorneys and judges who played crucial roles in obtaining and enforcing civil rights and ensuring opportunities for members of racial minority groups; stresses the importance of education, and teaches students how to apply to law school and become lawyers.

As president of the YLC, I hope for a day when such programs are no longer necessary—for the day when the legal profession truly reflects the diversity in our society. Until that day arrives, the YLC will address the disparities and encourage enhanced diversity in our profession. ☪