A Legacy of Pride: Students of Color Honor Professors

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A legacy of pride

Students of color honor professors

Just before the candle-lighting ceremony that has become one of UB Law School's most moving traditions, law student Jenny Lancaster, her voice filled with emotion, read an inspirational Maya Angelou poem, "And Still I Rise":

"You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise ..."

It was the annual Students of Color Recognition Dinner, and the latest class of about-to-be graduates gathered to toast their achievements and look to life beyond law school.

The dinner is a joint project of four organizations representing minority law students: the Asian-American, Latin American, Black and Native American law student associations. This year's event took place at the University Inn and Conference Center.

Two Law School professors, Makau Mutua and Charles Carr, were honored with the Jacob B. Hyman Award for their encouragement and mentoring of students of color. Mutua was honored as "an outstanding professor for his enthusiastic willingness to take on a variety of roles. He has opened his heart and home to us, and he rarely separates himself from his doctrine." Carr similarly was lauded as "an unsung hero. He regularly commits acts of pure altruism. He does good things for people because he cares about them and he cares for our community."

Doris A. Carbonell-Medina '87, a former member of the Latin American Law Students Association, gave the keynote address. After practicing law for eight years following graduation, with
Carbone-Medina now works for Prevention Focus Inc., a drug, alcohol and pregnancy prevention agency that provides education and counseling to women, young people and families. She runs workshops on youth development and life skills in schools and the community, working with teen-age girls, teen-age mothers and their families.

At the Students of Color Dinner, her message was a heartfelt and personal one.

"Your community, your family and your friends will now look up to you," she told the graduating students, "and they will look to you, for you have achieved a privileged status in society and you have attained a very prestigious title. You have come very far, but there is still so far to go."

Carbone-Medina noted the vagaries of the career path, saying: "I have not pursued a traditional course of career such as others would have. I guess that's because I am in the middle of my own journey and in the middle of my own career, and in transition.

"One thing about my life is that God has always been in it. I am not one of those people who developed without faith. That is because my life did not allow it. I have been brought to my knees, so to speak, and that is where I remain.

"People are fallible, and they will let you down. Material things are unreliable. Money and power and position come and go. Put your trust in the Lord."

"If you find love, do everything you can to keep it. Nurture it, weed it, feed it, replant it and help it grow so it will remain constant in your life. There are so few things in life that actually do bring you joy and that will help to contribute to the substance of your life and what is really important."

Carbone-Medina also dealt with some practical issues for the new lawyers. "Before you embark on this thing called a career," she advised them, "try to realize that you are alienating yourself. The circumstances will be such that you will exist in a separate universe. Nobody will be able to relate to you.
“Leadership does not mean politics, although it is a necessary pastime if you want to get places.”

except other lawyers. Consider when you’re being nasty, incorrigible and intolerable to live with. Because your personality will manifest those characteristics — if it doesn’t already!

“Leadership does not mean politics, although it is a necessary pastime if you want to get places. Just try not to sell your soul, because your soul will definitely be up for grabs.”

Finally, Carbonell-Medina drew on her experience in working with teenagers to give this advice:

“As an attorney, please give time to young people and children, and be leaders to them. Your community needs you to volunteer your time. Our future lies with our children and young people. If you have a positive effect on a child, you will help seven generations of that child’s family. Seven generations of that child’s family! And that is something to be remembered for.”

Arthur Wemegah ’98

The evening concluded with the traditional candle lighting ceremony, in which the third-year students passed on their “legacy” to students who will continue at UB Law School, secure in the knowledge that their educational journey is in good company.