A More Meaningful Student Experience

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A more meaningful student experience

A richer experience for UB School of Law students, and a more diverse legal profession – that’s the ambitious portfolio that comes with Lillie V. Wiley-Upshaw’s new role.

Wiley (inset), longtime leader of the school’s admissions department, is now vice dean for student engagement and inclusion. It’s a dual assignment that reflects the School of Law’s commitment to increasing access for minority and disadvantaged students, and making the student experience meaningful and rewarding. She is supported by Amy Hayes Atkinson, the law school’s director of special events and a seasoned pro at providing guidance and event planning support to the student body.

This focus on engagement, Wiley says, is about being “student-centered and student-focused. We want to be a place where students feel that their concerns are listened to and heard. When somebody cares about you, you’re better able to succeed.”

Toward that end, she’s taking the pulse of the institution including listening sessions with students, faculty and staff to explore what the school already does to facilitate a positive student experience and what it could do better.

“The school works best when we’re all working toward a shared goal and vision,” Wiley says, “but it takes effort on everyone’s part.”

The other part of her new title speaks to the core goal of making legal education accessible to traditionally underrepresented students. Wiley has been deeply involved in this mission already, especially through Discover Law, the school’s program for promising undergraduates of color. It brings students to campus for an intensive summer program that gives them a taste of law school life and opens new possibilities in their career thinking.

The fifth year of Discover Law will take place this summer, and it has proved its worth: Wiley says more than half of the students who have been through the program are either now in law school or are planning to go. Initial funding for the program from the Law School Admissions Council has ended, so organizers are seeking donations for this important initiative.

That’s a “pipeline” program, one of many Wiley sees as ways to diversify the school (and eventually the bar). A recent Youth Law Day brought students from four Buffalo public high schools to O’Brian Hall. Wiley also recently took a group of minority law students to Family Court, with the goal of exposing them to that area of practice as a career possibility.

In addition, Wiley has been appointed to UB’s Equity and Inclusion Committee, where she intends to “make sure the law school’s voice is included as the University moves forward on these issues.”

There will also be opportunities to collaborate with the law school’s Office of Admissions, where Lindsay J. Sutton Gladney was recently promoted to vice dean for admissions and the law school’s newest hire, Luke Ramey, is manager of recruitment and international enrollment services.

To find out how to support Discover Law visit: www.law.buffalo.edu/ScholarsProgram