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Diversity in the Profession

UB Law Forum

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UB LAW *responds:*

Diversity in the profession

“...AND JUSTICE FOR ALL.” The final words of the Pledge of Allegiance reflect the spirit of the legal profession – a justice system that reflects the American melting pot. Progress toward that ideal has been inconsistent: Minority lawyers now make up 16 percent of law firms but only 9 percent of partners in the U.S.* Here is how the UB School of Law community is working to make a difference.

→ **New director to expand our focus on diversity and inclusion**

The School of Law’s continuing effort to enhance our diverse and welcoming community took another step forward with the appointment of **Kendra N. Cadogan** as director of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Cadogan most recently served as an academic adviser and coordinator for the Daniel V. Acker Scholars Program, for gifted undergraduate students of color at the University at Buffalo. In that capacity, she created an intensive orientation program to acclimate students from diverse and underrepresented communities to UB’s campus.

Her role at the School of Law affects all members of our law school community. “Kendra is working with community partners, University departments, and with law administration, faculty and students to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in our community,” said **Dean Aviva Abramovsky**. “She will also work to continue UB Law’s award-winning Discover Law program.”

“This is a position that will touch students across the spectrum,” says **Bernadette Gargano**, vice dean for student affairs. “We want to continue to focus on our pipeline to law school programs in order to increase diversity in the profession as a whole, to increase diversity within our own communities including first-generation college students and students of color, and to make sure we keep inclusion and equity as a main focus throughout the school.”

Cadogan earned both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees at UB, her B.A. in psychology and sociology, and a master of education degree.



Q&A WITH KENDRA

Your job title includes responsibility for diversity, equity and inclusion. How do you define each of these in relation to the law school?

Diversity refers to the entire range of human difference, from race and socioeconomic status to gender, nationality, age, gender identity, religion and sexual orientation. Law schools benefit from having a wide range of diversity among faculty, students and staff, because the diversity of the larger society is reflected, and when students go out into the world they’re better prepared to practice and to effect change. Equity refers to treating people fairly across differences so that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. And inclusion is about making a deliberate effort to ensure that differences aren’t just tolerated but actively included and welcomed. It’s about creating an environment where everyone feels respected.

Up to now, you’ve mostly worked with undergraduate programs. What’s different about doing this work in a graduate school environment?

The biggest difference in a professional school is a greater range of ages. Graduate students tend to be a bit older and a little more settled with respect to their professional goals. The biggest difference here is the opportunity to work really closely with more faculty on these issues. In this position, I have the opportunity to effect change on a larger scale.

How focused on diversity is the law school’s student body, staff and faculty now?

The School of Law is definitely on the right track. During my interview process, one thing that I really appreciated was how many faculty members, staff members and students came to the interview and wanted to ask questions and be involved. It was clear that this is a school that is committed to looking at any areas in which more work

*Based on 2017 data collected by the Minority Corporate Counsel Association.

“ Inclusion is about making a deliberate effort to ensure that differences aren't just tolerated but actively included and welcomed. It's about creating an environment where everyone feels respected. ”

– Kendra N. Cadogan, director of diversity, equity and inclusion

can be done and then bringing resources to bear on those areas. People are very collaborative here, and I've had so many people reach out to me.

You've developed assessment tools in this area and used data to drive decision-making about programs. Why this focus on data analytics?

The idea is to use different kinds of assessments, both quantitative and qualitative, to get a snapshot of where we are, always with the idea that there's a certain place we want to be. The numbers don't necessarily tell the whole story, but they indicate where we need to initiate change. The community is always changing, and every year there's a new class, so you have to assess continuously. This allows you to revise where necessary and monitor those benchmarks.

You are carrying forward the highly successful Discover Law program for promising students of color. What's the status of funding for that program, and why is the law school so committed to it?

This year we were very lucky to receive a President's Circle grant from UB, and individual donors and big firms also made contributions that allowed us to host this summer's session.

We are now focused on raising the funds needed for next summer's session. It's so important to the School of Law because it's a proven step to increasing the number of underrepresented people in the profession, period. That's why people are so passionate about it.

How can alumni help?

I'm a UB graduate, and I know what a close-knit community Buffalo is. Alumni are our most important asset and resource. They've been so generous across the board, willing to mentor our students, willing to volunteer and give back, and we need them to continue to do those things.



Interested in supporting next year's Discover Law program?

Contact **Karen Kaczmarzski '89**, Vice Dean for Advancement at (716) 645-2109 or krkacz@buffalo.edu.



Left to right: Natalia Marte '19, Destiny M. Johnson '20, Donell L. Gibson, Jr. '18, Dwight D. Jackson '20 and Tiffany J. Barlow

Hub of activity

A busy and productive year for the Black Law Students Association

Reaching up, reaching back and reaching out, our Black Law Students Association is expanding its influence with a series of initiatives to support current students and encourage young people of color to consider law as a profession.

“We wanted to become a *thing*,” says **Donell L. Gibson Jr. '18**, BLSA's president this past year. “The perception of our chapter, even from some of our members, was that we were simply a student club. We wanted to highlight the fact that we're much more than that and we serve a much larger purpose.”

Toward that end, the group sponsored an impressive series of activities both on campus and beyond. They included:

- BLSA entered a four-person team in a mock trial competition sponsored by the Northeast Region of the National Black Law Students Association. The competition was held in conjunction with the region's annual convention in Albany in January, and a contingent of UB students, including the mock trial participants, made the trip. Financial support was provided by attorney **John Elmore** and the law firm Harris Beach, PLLC.

“This is new, our involvement at the wider level,” says Gibson, who notes that the national organization has nearly 6,000 members nationwide and has just celebrated its 50th anniversary. He served as treasurer of the Northeast Region, and BLSA vice president **Natalia Marte '19** has been elected chair of the region, with a

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