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Hub of Activity: A Busy and Productive Year for the Black Law Students Association

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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 Kaczmarski ’89, Vice Dean for Advancement at (716) 645-2109 or krkacz@buffalo.edu.

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
An innovation that has become a tradition – the School of Law’s Discover Law program for promising undergraduates of color – celebrated its sixth season in June. Discover Law aims to address a continuing challenge for law schools and the legal profession: how to attract and retain talented and diverse applicants and help them succeed in law school and in practice. Advocates call it a pipeline program, because it seeks to increase the pool of potential law students of color.

“Everyone’s reasons for wanting to join the legal profession are different,” notes Kendra Cadogan, UB School of Law’s director of diversity, equity and inclusion, who oversees the program. “Typically students say, ‘I really want to go to law school, and I know this program will give me the tools I need to be a successful applicant and to graduate.’”

Eighteen students participated in the program. Many were from New York State, mostly from Western New York and New York City.
Discover Law provides a unique opportunity for minority students by exposing them to the rigors of law school during their undergraduate years. As a legal community, we all benefit from the program as it often sparks interest in the legal profession in talented students who otherwise may have never dreamed of practicing law.”

– Stephanie A. Saunders ’00