ABA Law Student Division
Diversity Day / Diversity Week

In an effort to comply with ABA Goal III, the ABA Law Student Division has identified March 2 as “Diversity Day.” While the ABA Law Student Division promotes and encourages an environment of inclusion to be developed each day, March 2 is specifically set aside in an effort to join all law schools within the nation in making a collective statement of acceptance and understanding.

A website located at http://ambar.org/lsddiversity has been designed to assist law students in planning Diversity Day events and activities on their campuses and in their communities.

What is Diversity Day / Diversity Week?
Diversity Day is a time when law schools are encouraged to sponsor educational programs and events that teach and foster respect for persons of different races, genders, religions, classes, sexual orientations, and individuals with disabilities. This is a time to educate and focus on understanding the differences among us. It is a time to see and celebrate what separates us and to make the active choices to come together.

Many schools expand their program from Diversity Day to Diversity Week. Still a few others have expanded it to a year-round program.

The Diversity Day Toolkit
The ABA Law Student Division has put together some helpful tips and guidelines to assist you in planning your Diversity Day events and programs. This toolkit, located on the Division’s website at http://ambar.org/lsddiversity, has been prepared by law students for law students. Some of the resources include:

• Getting Started
• Ideas and Suggestions
• Tips for a Successful Event
• Pitfalls to Avoid
• Statistics

The Diversity Day Survey
There are many ways to promote and encourage a diverse culture at your law school or in your community. The key to bringing people together begins by introduction, understanding, and inclusion, whether it is through your SBA or other cultural groups at your school. Please visit our website at http://ambar.org/lsddiversity and share some of the activities and events that your law school is planning or has sponsored for Diversity Day. Excerpts will be posted on the website and shared with other law schools who strive to make a difference.

American Bar Association
Law Student Division
321 North Clark Street, 19th Floor
Chicago, IL 60610
http://abaforlawstudents.com

*If March 2 falls on a weekend, law schools may choose to celebrate Diversity Day on the preceding Friday or following Monday.
HELPING YOUR SCHOOL DEVELOP A DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

It is important to remember that creating a diversity committee is a long-term and extensive process; in order to assure its continuance, you must get your school involved. This means the committee should be comprised of students as well as staff and faculty. Having administration on your side will ease the fluidity of development and implementation of this process. It will also strengthen the committee’s longevity. This toolkit is designed to help you begin the process of creating a forum for discussing and planning diversity events and training at your law school.

- Before you begin this process, step back and evaluate your school’s vision. Is diversity a part of the overall strategic plan for your law school and the university as a whole? It is important that a diversity committee be a part of the overall strategic vision and not “something else.” Knowing how diversity connects to your school’s vision is essential to creating a plan and recruiting the support of administration.

- For a diversity plan to be successful it must have two components: the committee members must be individually accountable, and the results must be measurable. The organization of the committee creates ultimate accountability, but creation of an organizational structure and distribution of responsibilities creates individual accountability. In order to measure results, the committee should develop a scorecard that helps track their progress and aids in reporting to school administrators. In addition, the committee might want to use personnel-type evaluations to reflect and refine the school’s diversity goals.

  - It is important that you put together a diversity team, council, or committee of the proper size. Note that some experts say that more than 10 or 15 members can be counter-productive; this means limited numbers tend to create better organized and developed results. However, given the goals of diversity initiatives, in general; one should favor inclusion and find a way for willing individuals to participate. It is important to create a broad base of participation that includes students from all classes, faculty, staff, administration, and members of the community. So, you may be wondering how to accomplish both. One way would be to create an organization hierarchy or structure and allow members to join in participating. We see this at work in many organizations including the ABA, itself.

  - Include your entire school in the plan, but recognize that individuals need to understand their specific role in developing success. The committee leadership should indicate specific roles and tasks for each member. For example: one administration member might have the specific responsibility of appointing an ethnic minority member to chair an important faculty committee for the coming year.

- The committee should define diversity for the school. An example would be as follows [Diversity is: The many ways we are all alike, and respect for the ways we are different.] Diversity is more than race and gender. Ask your committee to create a definition that is easy to understand and communicate. The plan should include persons with disabilities and those of various religious backgrounds and sexual orientations.

- Again, support for diversity initiatives from all levels of the law school is important, but remember administration support is critical. Diversity teams ideally should be co-chaired by members of the administration. This allows the committee to have authority and legitimacy while serving as an advisory role for the administration.

- Create goals; goals help to develop and encourage a person or an organization along a path. It is important to establish both long and short term goals. Short term goals initiate and continue momentum, while rewarding participants with the satisfaction of completing them. Long term goals create incentive and direction; they keep organizations heading in the same direction. A plan could be designed for 12 to 18 months or even more, but it is essential to create quarterly checkpoints for consistent follow-up.

- Diversity training and education is critical for the success of any initiative. There is constant development and change in this area, so it is important to stay updated. The committee might want to develop a
“diversity handbook” for faculty, staff, and students to review. One strategy is that during orientation all students would view a 15-minute video on diversity with a 15 minute discussion afterwards. After students complete their orientation period, they could receive additional periodic training. Please keep in mind that not only should the students be reminded of their previous training, but also, the training should be developed over time. Be very deliberate in the selection of training for your students because not all diversity education will meet your objectives, and can often do more harm than good.

- For any diversity committee or diversity plan to be successful, diversity champions must be recognized. Give out awards and show how serious the law school considers the furtherance of diversity. Awards not only recognize effort that has already been accomplished, often they also encourage future recipients to perform. So, make sure that you choose awards that both encourage and recognize. This will optimize the committee’s results.

- Your school may have specific requirements for developing such a committee. You should research those steps in an effort to work with your school’s current system requirements. After you have done your homework and determine that your school could benefit from a diversity committee, meet with the law school and/or university administration along with other student bar leaders to discuss how your specific diversity committee might be formed. Like each person, each school and diversity committee has individual features and personality; it is important to enhance them naturally instead of covering over them. This means look at your strengths and feature them.
IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR DIVERSITY DAY EVENTS

1. Invite a current speaker on diversity training and communication styles.
2. Showcase relevant research projects related to diversity.
3. Get faculty and students together for a “lunch time” talk on law school diversity programs and how they can be improved.
4. Set up a 'buddy' system for international students to get better acquainted with attending law school in the United States.
5. Ask a psychologist to explain the effects of ADD and how it differs from ADHD to a group of students and faculty.
6. Showcase individuals with a special interest or accomplishment in diversity.
7. Display student and/or faculty work related to diversity.
8. Host a debate or public lecture on controversial diversity initiatives, like accommodations in law school.
9. Invite a civil rights champion to share his or her experiences and present an award for their efforts.
10. Hold mock trials on diversity topics.
11. Invite a special diversity speaker to a student bar association meeting.
12. Hold a guest lecturer for the community.
13. Locate and support efforts to assist a group of individuals in need: for example, run a clothes drive for the victims in of a recent natural disaster.
14. Highlight diversity support groups within the law school.
15. Develop an equity and diversity plan for your school or community.
16. Create a forum of education for understanding potential future clients; educate students about the multiple forms of communication. May be accomplished by:
   - Inviting a speaker, or
   - Creating a group discussion at lunch with faculty, in a meeting room with only students, or feature an article in your school newspaper.
17. Sponsor a mural about the cultural composition and heritage of your community.
18. Volunteer to be an advisor for an area student club.
19. Join with a local school and put on extracurricular activities to help students "find their place" at school and learn about their peers.
20. Coach a local school girls' sports team. Encourage schools to provide equal resources for boys' and girls' athletics.
21. Sponsor a conflict resolution team focused on diversity issues.
22. Ask school administrators what resources they have for
   - Supporting gay, lesbian and transgender youth—offer to find additional materials if necessary; and
   - Determining and accommodating students with cognitive, psychological, or physical disabilities.
23. Assess your school’s compliance with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Organize a class or commit student bar finances to improve compliance.

24. Donate a tape recorder to a school that is conducting oral history projects. Suggest a focus on local struggles for civil rights.

25. Start a pen pal program. Get law students or groups in touch with people in different parts of the community, country or world.

26. Encourage your school to go beyond the "heroes and holidays" model to develop a rich, ongoing multicultural curriculum.

27. Provide confidential methods for students or staff to report harassment or actions inconsistent with diversity goals.

28. Encourage school administrators to adopt Internet-use polices that address online hate, harassment and pornography.

29. Discourage the use of divisive school emblems.

30. Create a bilingual (or multilingual) calendar highlighting school and community activities.

31. Invite bilingual students to give updates, greetings, and announcements in your SBA meetings.

32. Celebrate a different "Nationality Day" each year in addition to Mother's Day or Father's Day. Highlight cultural food and history from that nationality on that day.

33. Ask the law school not to schedule tests or school meetings on the major holidays of any religious group. Develop a school calendar that respects religious diversity.

34. Frequent minority-owned businesses and get to know the proprietors. If your school caters events, choose a minority-owned catering service once every other or every three times.

35. Participate in a blood drive, or clean up a local stream. Identify issues that reach across racial, ethnic and other divisions and forge alliances for tackling them.

36. Start a monthly "diversity roundtable" to discuss critical issues facing your law school. Establish an equity forum.

37. Hold a community-wide yard sale and use the proceeds to improve a park or community center. Celebrate the event with a picnic.

38. Build a community peace garden.

39. Start a "language bank" of volunteer interpreters for all languages used in your community.

40. Encourage fellow members of your law school to be tolerance activists.

41. Create a SBA or school diversity website.

42. Host a "multicultural extravaganza" with food fair or art, fashion and talent show.

43. Create a mobile "street library" to make multicultural books and films widely available.

44. Bring people of diverse faiths together for workshops or roundtables. Be welcoming to agnostics and atheists, too.

45. Write a letter to the editor if your local newspaper ignores any segment of the community or stories about cooperation and tolerance.

46. Present a "disabilities awareness" event with the help of a local rehabilitation organization.

47. Make sure that anti-discrimination protection in your community extends to gay and lesbian people.

48. Have a forum or symposium in which anti-discrimination issues currently before the Supreme Court are debated, discussed, and the judgment predicted.

49. Whatever your program – give it a name, motto, or symbol to create the sense of a school-wide campaign.

Keep your law school community and the ABA Law Student Division apprised of your efforts.
TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

When planning your event, here are some ideas to keep in mind that will help your hard work pay off and ensure that your attendees will leave the program appreciating a unique experience.

1. When approaching faculty members about presenting a diversity program, talk with a professor about his/her hobbies or research interests. Chances are that this person would love to talk about his/her travels abroad, a community service project, or a hobby that would enhance our appreciation of diversity efforts.

2. When seeking presenters (faculty or staff) for your educational programs, try to bring in individuals who represent different ethnic groups, gender, and lifestyles. This can help your school make contact with people who represent diverse backgrounds.

3. When advertising diversity programs, use creative, quality publicity. Students may have difficulty understanding what diversity programs might include. Use titles that students can easily understand and specifically identify the topic of the program. If the focus is stereotypes in the media – say it; if it is sharing of cultures – say it; if it is racism – say it!

4. Remember that diversity programming or education must take place all year.

5. Use bulletin boards to celebrate a specific culture – ask students to become involved in this project! While this culture is being highlighted on the board, offer programs or study breaks that highlight the music, art, poetry, food or dress from that culture.

6. Research the cultural traditions and aspects of your program so they accurately reflect the highlighted cultures. The agenda and activity offered should convey the message that diverse groups have been included. Examples include calling a Christmas party a “Holiday Party” in celebration of all holidays occurring in December.

7. Make a personal commitment to hold students accountable for their words or actions that denigrate or dehumanize other students, including jokes or stories that are racist, sexist, etc.

8. Plan early. Promote your event in the law school and in the community in order to provide maximum attendance and create a link between the law school and the community it occupies.

9. Even if you do a symposium or roundtable, provide time at the end for attendees to meet and mingle. Having the opportunity to speak casually with featured speakers and champions of minority issues is important to students.

10. Provide means and accessibility to community members with disabilities.

11. Prepare to respond to possible insensitive comments or gestures from participants during discussion periods.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

In constructing a Diversity Day event, it is important to develop your programs in a way that makes everyone feel included. There are common mistakes that student leaders inadvertently make which could hinder their hard work. Here are a couple of ideas to keep in mind as you plan your event.

1. Check the calendar to prevent scheduling your event to coincide with any religious observance that may exclude some members of your school or community.

2. Avoid anything that may be misconstrued as a reflective stereotype or assumption about any ethnic or political group, lifestyle preference, or gender.

3. In your publicity, be cognizant that you are not depicting any groups based on stereotypes.

4. The scope and publicity should convey an open invitation to all, not just members of one group (i.e.: ethnic and racial programs, gender issues, religious concerns, sexual alliances, special needs coalitions).

5. When planning activities during traditional Christian holidays make a commitment not to “mask” a Christmas party by leaving out “Christ” or holy words. Students will know that in essence the party is meant to celebrate Christmas.