

MARLENA ELLIS

Mellis033@g.rwu.edu

EDUCATION

Roger Williams University School of Law, Bristol, RI

Candidate for Juris Doctor, May 2021

Honors: Voted Best Supporting Law Student at RWU Law, RWU Leadership Scholarship Recipient;
American Bar Association Legal Opportunity Scholar

Leadership: West Academic Student Advisor, Christian Law Student Society, Founder/President 2018-2019

Activities: Trial Team, RWU Law Library Student Assistant, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, West Chester, PA

Master of Science, Criminal Justice, December 2016

GPA: 3.78/4.00

Honors: National Criminal Justice Honor Society Alpha Phi Sigma

Activities: Studied Abroad in Lima Peru, Summer, 2015; AmeriCorps Vista Volunteer

Bachelor of Science, Criminal Justice, May 2013

Honors: Pennsylvania Board of Governor's Scholar, Philadelphia City Scholarship Recipient

Leadership: Student Government Association Representative, Gospel Ministries Board Member

Activities: Multicultural Recruitment Team Tour Guide, Youth Empowerment and Urban Studies Program

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

West Academic Student Advisor

August 2019- present

Serves on the West Academic Board of Advisors. Responsible for reviewing and providing feedback to West Academic regarding products and marketing strategies. Engages and promotes products to students.

Christian Law Student Society, Founder/President

August 2018- present

Assembled an executive board, created the organization's constitution and was approved by the SBA within the first 90 days of first year of law school. Developed strategic programs to bring awareness to and address student's mental health needs. Delivered motivational speeches to approximately 100 students every week.

District Attorney's Office of Philadelphia Youth Aid Panel

April 2017- August 2018

Collaborated with city leaders, police officers and community members to implement and supervise weekly diversion opportunities for first time youth offenders. Developed and implemented strategic objectives to encourage the success of participants. Spoke as an advocate for the young people in the program and prevented many from having criminal records. Served as Secretary and monitor for the 22nd Police District.

Director of Outreach at Hope City Christian Church

January 2015-January 2018

Responsible for creating, implementing and managing all church outreach and community service projects for diverse populations in Philadelphia such as Back to School giveaways, community days and Holiday events. Led a team of volunteers in conducting on the street, door to door and public transportation surveys to determine the need of the people in the city and created programs and community events to meet most of those needs. Cultivated relationships with the community at large through transparent leadership, tackling tough topics and facilitating discussions which led to strong and meaningful relationships with community members. Gathered and provided resources and services for domestic violence, human trafficking and sex trafficking victims and transported victims to hospitals or transitional homes when necessary.

West Chester University Student Government Representative

August 2012 - May 2013

Advocated on behalf of minority students on campus. Hosted and facilitated events that introduced the minority perspective and encouraged students to consider issues from multiple perspectives.

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

White and Williams, LLP, ***Summer Associate***

Summer 2019

Federal Public Defender of Delaware, ***Spring Break Intern***

Spring Break, 2019

The District Attorney's Office of Philadelphia, ***Paralegal***

May 2013-August 2018

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My name is Marlena Ellis and I am a second year student at Roger Williams University School of Law in Bristol, Rhode Island and I am running for the ABA Law Student at Large position.

I was raised in the Strawberry Mansion section of North Philadelphia, where the high school graduation rate is amongst the lowest in Philadelphia. For years, I struggled with the hardships of living in a single parent home in the inner city. Homicides and violent crimes plague my neighborhood but instead of becoming a victim of my circumstances I chose to become victorious despite them. Instead of embracing the streets, I embraced scholastics. I focused on academics instead of my adversity. I spent years searching my neighborhood for a positive role model, but eventually, I stopped looking for that person and I decided that I would become that person. I grew up in a poor neighborhood, I was educated in an underfunded school system, and there was no one to speak up for children like me. Having lacked an advocate, I began to fearlessly express my concerns to anyone who would listen. I became involved with leadership endeavors in school and soon became a powerful voice within my community and my city.

As a prospective candidate for the position of Representative- At- Large, my priorities among others include, addressing and bringing awareness to mental health issues, increasing and supporting underrepresented populations in the legal field and improving law student participation in the ABA. I have an extensive leadership background including undergraduate, law school and community leadership positions all of which qualify me for the job. If elected, I will lead with transparency and boldness and advocate for the needs and concerns of the law student community. My overarching goal is to continue to build upon the ideas of the leaders that came before me while establishing a strong foundation for the future representatives to stand and build upon.

My experience as the Founder and President of my law school's only religious organization, has enabled me to develop the skills needed to serve at a greater capacity. Through that experience, I was able to build a team of total strangers, unite them for a common goal, receive the requisite signatures needed for a new student organization, write a constitution, write an organization budget and engage the campus community all within 90 days of residing in the state of Rhode Island. This position exemplifies how I can adapt to new environments with ease and build and support a team of efficient, dedicated individuals.

Mental Health

The first area that I am committed to is raising awareness for and combating mental health issues in the law student community. This includes identifying circumstances that lead to the issue in the first place. One thing that can affect a student's mental health is the unhealthy competitive nature fostered in a typical law school environment. It is my belief that it is possible to work hard and rise to achieve your goals in law school without having to tear others down in the process. One way to increase student mental health is by spreading positivity and encouragement through inspirational messages. In my first year of law school I was nominated and voted Best Supporting Student as a result of the weekly Monday Motivational speeches that I delivered to almost 100 students per week. A great deal of students have expressed how those motivational messages helped boost their confidence and improve their mental health. I believe that it would be a great idea for the Council or other leadership entities within the ABA to alternate in spreading short motivational messages to the law student community through email, and social media alike. In that way, the Council could push policy and purpose at the same time. This would also serve to develop stronger ties to the law school community at large, some of whom do not see or hear from the Council unless attending an ABA meeting.

Another way to help law students and their mental health is to offer more resources to students. However; one barrier to offering resources is the stigma among students as it relates to utilizing those resources. No one seems to want to utilize the services because they feel singled out and sometimes even embarrassed. I propose that next year's Council create a forum or space in which students are able to candidly express the triumphs and pitfalls of battling mental health in law school. Creating a safe space of this sort would let law students know that they are not alone and may encourage more students to seek the help that they desire but are afraid to pursue.

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The final way that I believe that mental health among law students should be addressed is through better training of professors and law school administrators. If we teach people how to handle such issues in a professional way and explain the things that may trigger a student, then that will lead to greater support for students.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion is a term that is widely spoken, but not widely embraced. It seems to be a catchy term for law schools, firms and organizations to throw around in order to attract minorities and diverse populations, but what happens when an entity attracts a student but does not acknowledge the needs of the student? This is what has occurred in the legal field time and time again, so I propose not to just invite minorities to the table, but to create systems and strategies that will support them when they arrive. What exactly does this look like? There is no one answer, and no single person can answer, because a part of diversity and inclusion is learning to solicit and accept multiple perspectives. The goal is retention. Not just to reach diverse populations, but keep those populations. It requires the understanding that a one size fits all approach will not suffice. This system will include more than internet surveys but commitment to hearing the needs of underrepresented populations in this field and creating solutions and support systems. This will lead to recognizing the barriers that face diverse students and working to tear those barriers down.

ABA Law Student Involvement

In my capacity as a Student Advisor for West Academic, I am responsible for helping increase marketing strategies and the skills that I have learned in that capacity will help me in my efforts to increase law student involvement in the ABA. I would suggest that there are greater outreach efforts as it relates to specific regions, states and schools. Perhaps, the ABA can have a table at the yearly organization fair that most law schools have at the beginning of each semester.

For the students who are informed about the ABA, finances may serve as a barrier to access to the ABA. There are overwhelming statistics that point to the fact that law students struggle with their finances. Financial instability or inability to pay the law student premium membership cost could be one reason why many law students have opted not to sign up. To this issue I propose implementing the Sponsor a Student (SAS) program which would be a partnership with attorney's, law firms, and organizations who propose to pay the membership fee of one or as many law students as he or she wishes to help. This could be a one-time arrangement or a continual partnership. This arrangement will allow financially burdened students to take part in the wonderful organization that is the ABA.

I come from a neighborhood in which statistics show that I had a greater chance of being identified by an inmate number than a law school student number. I am a first generation, African American female who is qualified to lead and serve and my boldness is unmatched. My Monday speeches exemplify relevant attributes such as my boldness, exceptional interpersonal skills and my ability to adapt to new environments with ease. From the streets of Philadelphia, as a Director of Outreach to the classrooms of Rhode Island, as a voice of reason for my colleagues, I have used my voice as a way to advocate on behalf of others and I would love to use my voice to lead and serve as the 2020-2021 Representative At Large. If elected you will receive Marlena Ellis, the servant, the advocate, the motivator and you will not regret it.