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An Introduction to the Deans' Diversity Council

by David H. Getches and José Roberto (Beto) Juárez, Jr.

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In the May 2007 CBA President's Message to Members, immediate Past-President Elizabeth Starrs focused on the topic of diversity.¹ In her message, Starrs highlighted the Deans' Diversity Council (Council), an initiative created by the University of Colorado (CU) Law School and the University of Denver (DU) Sturm College of Law.² This article further describes this new initiative and reports on the Council's activities.

Council Overview

There is no substantial disagreement among firms, companies, and Bar leaders regarding the importance of diversity in the legal profession. Further, in *Grutter v. Bollinger*,³ the U.S. Supreme Court recognized that the benefits of diversity:

are not theoretical but real, as major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today's increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.

We created the Council in 2006 to bring together leaders of the Denver legal community to address the difficulties employers have enhancing diversity in the legal profession. Despite the concerted efforts of employers, the employment statistics for diverse attorneys are dismal. According to the National Association for Law Placement, only 5 percent of partners at member law firms nationwide are minorities.⁴ The national average for minority associates is nearly 17 percent; in Denver, the figure is only 12.39 percent.⁵

Firms are concerned in part because the shortage of minority attorneys impairs their business prospects. A striking example of this is "A Call to Action: Diversity in the Legal Profession,"⁶ which is a Commitment Statement signed by more than 100 Fortune 500 corporations asking law firms to increase their diversity or risk losing signatory corporations as clients.

The Council was created to bring together those who could best address this pressing issue. The Council, which is more than fifty-members strong, includes managing partners of prominent law firms, general counsel from some of Colorado's largest corporations, members of the judiciary, leading government attorneys, Bar leaders, and others committed to diversity. In just a few short months, the Council has generated tremendous momentum and support.

Vision Statement

The Council has created a Vision Statement, which has been signed by twenty-eight firms and organizations. The Vision Statement reads:

Diversity in the legal profession fosters both legal excellence and social equality. The Council is committed to transformation of the legal profession with the following results: By the year 2016, all Denver metro law firms and corporate legal departments will have successfully developed and implemented initiatives that create cultures of inclusion where attorneys of all backgrounds succeed without regard to gender, race, religion, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation.

This goal will be realized through the Council's "Campaign for Inclusive Excellence." The term "Inclusive Excellence" moves be-

yond focusing on numbers, and involves embedding practices and philosophies that encourage diversity in every aspect of an organization.

Work of the Council

The Council's first meeting took place at the DU Sturm College of Law on November 8, 2006, and attracted forty-five leaders of the profession. The group generated ideas for the inaugural Rocky Mountain Legal Diversity Summit, a major diversity conference that will be held on September 20, 2007. For more on the Diversity Summit, see the "Bar News Highlight" on page 15 of this issue or visit <http://www.cobar.org/diversityconference>.

In addition, an overwhelming number of Council members have made long-term commitments to the Council by volunteering to participate on one of the Council's three working groups: (1) Pipeline—increasing the pool of qualified diverse applicants to Colorado law schools; (2) Recruiting—improving recruitment of qualified diverse law students, new attorneys, and lateral applicants to Denver area law firms and corporations; and (3) Retention—transforming cultures within legal organizations to ensure retention of diverse attorneys.

On April 23, 2007, the Council met again at the CU Law School; more than fifty people were in attendance. Council members discussed a major survey that currently is underway. The survey is being sent to Denver metro attorneys and includes questions about their attitudes and practices concerning diversity. The survey results will be presented and discussed at the Diversity Summit in September.

At the April Council meeting, the Pipeline, Recruitment, and Retention working groups reported on their tangible efforts. These include reaching out to colleges and secondary schools to increase the diversity pipeline, developing new approaches to recruiting, and developing retention best practices.

We are confident that with the continued hard work of all participants, the Council will fulfill its critical initial mission of achieving Inclusive Excellence in the Denver legal community. The hope is ultimately to duplicate the successes achieved at the local level throughout the entire state.

Notes

1. Starrs, "Diversity Matters," 36 *The Colorado Lawyer* 5 (May 2007).

2. *Id.* at 6.

3. *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 330-31 (2003).

4. See "Women and Minorities in Private Practice—Additional Perspectives," *National Association for Law Placement Bulletin* (Feb. 2007) at T.1, available at <http://www.nalp.org/content/index.php?pid=484>.

5. *Id.* at T.2.

6. Available at <http://www.clocalltoaction.com>.

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