

Law Student Division

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The FBA Law Student Division: Looking Back and Moving Forward

An idea had been floating around the Federal Bar

Association (FBA) for some time—a law student division. Following the efforts of several past presidents, including Lawrence Baca, Jim Richardson, and Juanita Sales Lee, and past section and division officers, such as Kent Hofmeister, the FBA officially launched its Law Student Division in September 2012. To help establish the new division, FBA Past President Robert DeSousa created the Law Student Division Task Force. The Task Force comprises law students, law professors, deans, recent graduates, established attorneys, and FBA staff, all committed to making the idea of a Law Student Division a reality. This varied group of individuals meets monthly via conference call, while undertaking their own individual initiatives to establish and raise awareness of the FBA Law Student Division in the interim. Since the creation of the task force, the law student membership of the FBA has more than doubled and law student divisions have been formed coast-to-coast from New Hampshire to UCLA to Chicago Kent to the University of Kansas.

As of April 14, 2014, there are 1,045 law student members in the FBA. Some of these students have organized into Law Student Divisions. Others remain as members affiliated with local chapters. Although this represents a significant increase in membership, the pool of potential new law student members is vast. In fact, there are more than 130,000 law students currently enrolled at accredited law schools nationwide.¹ Across the FBA chapters, sections and divisions, members of the FBA are committed to recruiting and supporting law student members, as these members are the future of the FBA. Steven Smith, FBA director of membership and marketing, recognizes the importance of Law Student Divisions. “The future and stability of FBA depends in no small part on students and their continued participation as they finish their education and move into practice. The Federal Bar Association values the participation and input from the law student associates that are a part of the organization.”²

In order to best support this commitment, the Law Student Division Task Force created two informational handouts and developed

a web page. First, the task force established a recommended governance structure within each Law Student Division. To implement that structure, the Task Force developed a handout for law students interested in forming a Law Student Division at their law school. This document provides financial, adviser, networking, and division governance guidance for interested law students. This document is available on the Law Student Division webpage through the larger FBA website, www.fedbar.org.

The Law Student Division web page also provides information of interest to law student members. For example, the members of the task force serve as liaisons to the various FBA circuits. Accordingly, law students can ascertain who serves as the liaison for their circuit and these individuals can be incredibly helpful in supporting law students as they establish their Law Student Divisions. Moreover, several FBA sections have provided information about their organization, such as the subject matter that serves as the focus of the section and annual events that may be of interest. Law students are also able to find information on other potential events of interest, such as conventions and CLE's. On the whole, the webpage is designed to support law students who are or who may become members of the FBA.

The task force has also recognized the integral part that FBA chapters play in creation of Law Student Divisions. Although law student divisions fall within an independent FBA division, it is anticipated and hoped that there will be substantial interaction between law student divisions and FBA chapters. For this reason, the task force developed a written plan designed to help FBA chapters foster the development of new Law Student Divisions within each locale. This document is available to chapters through the FBA national staff and can be obtained via e-mail. Chapters may also utilize the uniform governance structure for local Law Student Divisions established by the task force to assist with outreach initiatives that establish and bolster the divisions at the law schools in their areas. In other words, local chapter officers should work with Law Student Division officers at a particular law school to develop a mutually ben-

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official relationship. For example, one Chapter has discussed pairing with a Law Student Division to put on monthly workshops. In these workshops, students would enjoy hands-on experiences applying the practical side of their legal education, seminars on legal developments, and collaborative discussions. Chapters benefit by attracting new members to the FBA while serving the needs of the federal practice, which is the mission of the FBA.

This type of interaction is already underway. For example, the Oregon Chapter of the FBA's Young Lawyers Division (YLD) has had success in developing relationships with its Law School Divisions, particularly the Lewis and Clark Law School's Division. The FBA introduced itself to Lewis and Clark through a mixer held at the law school toward the end of the school year in 2013. In 2014, the Oregon Young Lawyers Division hosted a law student/lawyer mixer that attracted judges, practitioners, and a large number of law students. The president of the Oregon Young Lawyer Division has also been meeting with the Lewis and Clark Law Student Division to get a sample for the types of events the Law Student Division may be interested in during the course of the upcoming school year. In the Fall of 2014, the YLD and Law School Division are planning a career and job search-focused event, which will likely be held in conjunction with a welcome back mixer. Having close contact between the YLD and the Law School Divisions has enabled the Law School Divisions to get to know some younger lawyers that are closer to their experience level. Moreover, there is now closer coordination between the chapter, YLD, and Law Student Division leadership.

Similarly, the Capitol Hill Chapter has also taken their own initia-

tive to reach out to law students. As several chapters have done, last year, the chapter added a Law Student Representative to the Chapter's council as an appointed, non-voting member. Shortly thereafter, the chapter amended its constitution to allow the Law Student Representative to sit as a voting member. The Capitol Hill Chapter has also held outreach events at area law schools, hosting panel discussions about the federal practice, nontraditional career paths, and the job responsibilities of new attorneys entering the practice. The Foundation of the Federal Bar provided funding for these events, which boasts attendance of between 30 and 60 law students at each event. The Capitol Hill Chapter's activities are also not limited to area law students. Each summer, Washington, D.C., hosts numerous summer associates and interns. The Capitol Hill Chapter provides tours of federal buildings, luncheons, and happy hours, all which welcome these future attorneys who are likely far from home.³

These are just a few examples of how law students can interact with the FBA, using Law Student Divisions as a conduit. The FBA looks forward to substantial interactions between FBA chapters and student divisions, leading to robust and valuable experiences.

Although fostering relationships is integral to the future of the Law Student Division, the task force sought to establish a medium that can directly assist law students while they pursue their academic and post-graduate careers. For this reason, the task force created a permanent column in *The Federal Lawyer*, entitled "Law Student Perspective" (through which this article appears). This column is open to submissions from law students, law professors, law school administrators, and attorneys supporting Law Student Divi-

sions. Although there is no particular topical limitation, writers are encouraged to submit articles about law student issues, study tips, employment strategies, educational development, and Law Student Division activities. In the March 2014 issue, Margaret "Gosia" Fonberg and Nadia Dahab published the first of many articles to come, providing insight into choosing the appropriate state in which to take a bar exam.⁴ In the May issue, Anthony Teesdale, a law student from the University of South Dakota, covered employment opportunities in the rural practice of law.⁵

Significant strides have been made to reach out to law students, but the question of financial support for Law Student Divisions requires consideration. As an initial starting point, chapters are not required to financially support the Law Student Divisions. That being said, if chapters are in a position to provide financial support, such support is very much appreciated. Similarly, the national FBA currently does not provide direct financial support for Law Student Divisions.

Given the foregoing, how then are Law Student Divisions to financially support themselves? It is expected that Law Student Divisions will submit funding requests to their home institutions through normal funding processes. Additionally, there is funding available through partnerships with FBA entities. For example, a Law Student Division and FBA chapter may jointly apply for funding through the FBA's Chapter Activity Fund. Likewise, a Law Student Division may partner with one of the 30 plus FBA sections and divisions to put on an event focusing on a particular subject matter. Another option may be to seek funding for charitable works and public service through the Federal Bar Foundation. In short, substantial funding opportunities exist through various entities associated with the FBA.

Questions of affordability are not limited to Law Student Divisions. At the core of the Law Student Divisions are, of course, the law students. The task force has spent a substantial amount of time considering an affordable dues structure, ensuring that law students will not be dissuaded from joining the FBA based on financial ability. Currently, yearly dues for law students are \$35. The task force, in conjunction with the FBA National Board of Directors and National Council, are working to develop a membership pricing structure that would be more affordable to law students and those who have gradu-

ated from law school, but not yet passed the bar. It is hoped that the new membership pricing structure for these individuals will be unveiled in the fall of 2014.

The task force's primary objective is to work itself out of a job. In other words, when the Law Student Division is an established fixture within the FBA and capable of self-governance, there will no longer be a need for a task force. Regardless, a lot of hard work has been put forth, and more hard work is yet to come. The next steps include establishing more individual Law Student Divisions within law schools, fostering of relationships with local chapters, continuing to inquire into financial concerns, and building a nationwide network of legal professionals willing to support Law Student Divisions. To get involved or for more information, please contact your circuit liaison, whose contact information is available through the Law Student Division webpage, www.fedbar.org/Leadership/Leadership-Resources/Law-Student-Division-Task-Force-Liaisons.aspx. Thank you for looking back at the past few years with the Task Force. Hopefully, you are inspired to help us move forward into the future! ☺

Endnotes

¹American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admission to the Bar, Enrollment and Degrees Awarded 1963-2012, available at www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/statistics/enrollment_degrees_awarded.authcheckdam.pdf.

²E-mail from Steven Smith, FBA director of membership and marketing, (April 14, 2014, 10:41 EST).

³E-mail from Amy Boser, chapter president, Capitol Hill Chapter (April 14, 2014, 4:29 EST); E-mail from Gerald Leverich, law student representative, Capitol Hill Chapter (April 14, 2014, 11:28 EST).

⁴Margaret "Gosia" Fonberg and Nadia Duhab, *Eeny Meeny Miny Moe: Which Bar Exam Should I Take?*, THE FEDERAL LAWYER, Vol. 61, Is. 2, at 12 (2014).

⁵Anthony Teesdale, *Draining the Waters Around Islands of Justice: Opportunities in Rural Practice for New Law School Graduates*, THE FEDERAL LAWYER, Vol. 61, Is. 4 (2014).

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