



Law Student Perspective

by Jon Simpson and Kate Marples

How to Start a Federal Bar Association Student Division

It may not occur to many students to start a new student organization. It did not occur to us until several of our professors, who are Federal Bar Association (FBA) members, asked us if we were interested in creating a student division. And even after accepting their invitation, it did not immediately occur to us how to begin. Through trial and (mostly harmless) error, however, we found our way. This article describes that way for those students who feel similarly inspired to access for their peers and law schools the numerous benefits of FBA involvement.

Step One: How to Start a Student Division

The first step is selecting a group of students who are interested and capable of getting the student division off to a good start. We started with a board made up of a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. We developed a plan for what we wanted to accomplish the first year and divided duties up among ourselves. The three things we wanted to accomplish during our inaugural year were to: (1) fulfill all the necessary requirements to become a recognized student organization at the law school and the larger university; (2) increase awareness and membership; and (3) organize one big speaking event and three networking events with federal judges in the spring semester.

Every law school will have different procedures for becoming a recognized student organization. We contacted our associate dean for administration, who among many other things oversees our student organizations, and asked her what we needed to do at the law school. If your law school provides funding to student organizations, it is important to try to meet any deadlines for receiving funding or other support. Because our student division did not form until the middle of the fall semester, we missed the law school funding deadline. Law schools may also be able to help a new student division by providing meeting space or office space, by promoting events through student body e-mails, providing a student organization mailbox, and by helping to promote or fund large events.

Getting established at the university level will also vary from school to school. We registered with our Student Involvement

and Leadership Center, which allowed us to be listed on the university's website to attract new members. This can be particularly helpful for divisions interested in recruiting undergraduate students who are thinking about going to law school. Many universities may have additional opportunities to receive funding or support from student government. Our student government will not grant funding to student organizations that charge dues and strictly limits the use of any awarded funds to exclude expenses related to travel, speakers, and food. So it is a good idea to ask about any such restrictions before applying for funding. Complying with university-wide expectations may also lead to opportunities like leadership training, being able to promote new divisions at student information fairs or new student orientation events, and the ability to use larger university venues for speaking events.

A new board can do several things to make it easier for subsequent boards. We opened a bank account at a bank that does not charge us any fees, provides us with a debit card, and allows us to change signatories each year. Prior to establishing this account, we had to have one of our members apply for an employer identification number from the IRS. Our secretary followed a nice step-by-step guide.¹ An easy online process generates the number. Then the bank guided us through the rest of the process to associate the number with the division's bank account. We also created a Gmail account for our division so that we could all access the same e-mail to answer questions and organize our networking events and meetings.

Step Two: Where to Find Members

One of the most important things a new division can do is start to raise awareness and generate membership. Because all of our first-year board members were 3Ls, our goal was to recruit 1Ls who would have two more years to really get the organization started. We promoted the FBA student division with write-ups in our law school's weekly e-mails to all students, by promoting events through our member listserve, writing event information on chalkboards, and talking to our friends and mentees. The biggest driver we had was event promotion.

Kate Marples and Jon Simpson both graduated from the University of Kansas School of Law in May 2014 and will clerk for federal judges in Kansas starting in the Fall of 2014. They submitted this article on behalf of the new Kansas Law Student FBA Division.

Step Three: What Events to Put On

Despite missing the law school's deadline for student organization funding and our student government's restrictions on awards—essentially making the funding awards useless for events—there are many opportunities to receive event funding from local FBA chapters and national sections and divisions. Information about funding can be obtained from chapter, section, and division leaders. Their information is listed on the FBA website under their respective categories. The FBA also has numerous speakers in different practice areas who are happy to come speak at law school events.² We were thrilled to have Raymond Dowd as our inaugural speaker. He presented “Murder, Mystery, and Masterpieces: Ethical Implications of World War II Stolen Art”. The presentation was especially beneficial for promoting our organization beyond the law school and university communities. We chose to have this be an evening event so that more community members could attend. We hope to continue this trend by having two large speaking events per year, one in the fall and one in the spring. In our final meeting, we formally ushered in



In addition to speaking events, our division decided to promote networking opportunities for students to meet with federal judges. We learned that other student divisions enjoyed success with brown bag lunches at judges' chambers. We decided to plan one of these per month for February, March, and April. These events are really great whether they attract a large number of students or just a few. Our events ran the gamut. The best advice is to be flexible.

our successors, a student-elected board of primarily 1Ls and one 2L. They are already planning for the possibility of offering CLE credit at one of the division's events next year.

In addition to speaking events, our division decided to promote networking opportunities for students to meet with federal judges. We learned that other student divisions enjoyed success with brown bag lunches at judges' chambers. We decided to plan one of these per month for February, March, and April. These events are really great whether they attract a large number of students or just a few. Our events ran the gamut. The best advice is to be flexible. Our first event was a small dinner at the law school with a federal district court judge from Wichita, Kan. We were also able to schedule events with two federal magistrate judges. We had a great response to our requests, and the events really benefitted the members who were able to attend. We scheduled an event with a judge from each federal courthouse in Kansas—Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City—so that we could, if possible, also tour the courthouses and watch proceedings.

Conclusion

The main thing to keep in mind is that not everything has to be done the first year. Providing subsequent boards with the basic structure they will need to continue is enough for the first year. Increasing awareness, membership, and developing potential networking opportunities with local federal judges are great ways to start.³

The benefits to forming a student division are numerous. They include allowing small group meetings in judge's chambers, the opportunity to invite nationally recognized speakers on any

subject from the FBA's extensive list of potential speakers, and to plan these events—another opportunity to network with local attorneys in areas of interest. For more information about the benefits of starting a student division, please visit the FBA's website.⁴ ☺

Endnotes

¹William and Mary Student Leadership Development, *Tax ID/Employer ID Number for Information for Registered Student Organizations*, available at www.wm.edu/offices/studentleadershipdevelopment/documents/EINForRegisteredStudentOrganizations.pdf.

²For more information on speakers contact Sherwin Valerio, FBA Sections and Divisions manager. www.fedbar.org/About-Us/National-Staff.aspx.

³The FBA website also provides information about how to start a new student division. We found these documents helpful: *Starting a Federal Bar Association Student Division*, available at <http://www.fedbar.org/Image-Library/Leadership/Starting-Student-Division-Handbook.aspx>; there are even examples of student division constitutions, see e.g., www.fedbar.org/Image-Library/Leadership/Sample-Law-Student-Division-Constitution.aspx.

⁴Federal Bar Association Law Student Division, available at www.fedbar.org/Divisions/Law-Student-Division.aspx.