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Dean's Column: Collaborations with Professional Associations

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“Part of the law school’s mission is to help our students understand the responsibility of lawyers as privileged members of a community.”

Dean’s Column

BY DEAN JOHN VALERY WHITE AND PROF. RACHEL J. ANDERSON

COLLABORATIONS WITH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The law school’s many relationships with the practicing bar in Nevada enrich our students’ law school experience and help prepare them to practice responsibly. Boyd students benefit from law school and faculty collaborations with professional associations; students observe and are mentored by individuals who commit to a professional life that includes service and contributions to state and local communities that go beyond the practice of law. Law school collaborations with professional associations in the community provide opportunities for students to develop relationships with members of the practicing bar and bench, demonstrate the importance and rewards of service and help educate students about what it means to be a responsible and engaged lawyer in a community.

The law school’s relationship with the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association (the LVNBA) is an especially strong one that reflects institutional collaborations, faculty involvement and active student participation in the association’s activities. The LVNBA is Nevada’s only local affiliate of the National Bar Association, the oldest minority bar association in the country and the largest organization of African-American attorneys and judges in the United States.

The LVNBA is among several local bar associations that encourage student membership in the organization (at no cost to students). Student members attend meetings and other association activities and are encouraged to contribute in substantive ways. The LVNBA works closely with the Black Law Students’ Association at the law school, coordinating a mentoring program that pairs Boyd students with attorneys in the community and working with diverse leaders in business to identify employment and other opportunities. Membership in both the LVNBA and the Black Law Students Association is open to everyone. Moreover, for 23 years, the LVNBA’s annual gala has raised funds that help Nevada students attend law school. Since Boyd’s founding, the majority of those scholarships have been awarded to Boyd students. In 2012 when the National Bar Association, with more than 20,000

members, hosts its annual conference in Las Vegas, there will be many more opportunities for students to volunteer, network and participate in service activities.

The LVNBA and other local bar associations directly support law school activities. In September of last year, the law school held its first public interest film festival, which highlighted four documentary films focusing on the contributions of lawyers devoted to public service. A number of local associations, including the LVNBA, the Nevada Access to Justice Commission, Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Nevada Legal Services, the South Asian Bar Association and the Las Vegas Latino Bar Association, sponsored the film festival and were instrumental in ensuring its success. This kind of collaboration enriches our students’ experience and allows the law school to engage members of the university community and the public in its public service mission.

Among the most visible of the collaborations between the law school and the LVNBA is the LVNBA archive housed at the Wiener-Rogers Law Library. Consisting of association records, founders’ and members’ memorabilia, photographs and oral histories of community members, the archive documents the contributions of African-American lawyers to Las Vegas. Using the archive, scholars, students of all ages, and members of the public can undertake research in primary sources that record civil rights history in the state and that reflect the unique contributions of African-American lawyers. The library is developing an online component to the physical archive that will highlight archival materials along with educating and informing the public. We look forward to working with other public interest organizations in the community to preserve and document their histories.

Part of the law school’s mission is to help our students understand the responsibility of lawyers as privileged members of a community. Working with professional associations that share our mission helps us accomplish that goal and ensures that our students interact with attorneys who meaningfully fulfill that responsibility. ■