Diversity Best Practices:
Tips for the Career Services Office

The role of a career services office (CSO) is often broad and varied. Although the primary focus is assisting students in career readiness, the path to meeting this objective can include many sub-categories of responsibilities and require an in-depth knowledge of an array of topics. Integrated into the work of a busy CSO are many opportunities for diverse students as well as opportunities for working toward greater diversity and inclusion in the practices both of the office and of the greater law school. Getting a firm grasp of the role diversity plays within the CSO can be a challenge, however, so the NALP Diversity and Inclusion Section has compiled the following tips on diversity best practices for CSOs.

1. Research and Evaluate the Law School’s Institutional Priorities and Develop a Strategic Plan for the Career Services Office

   a. Understand the institution’s mission and broad diversity strategic plan
      A good diversity plan links the goals of diversity with other components of the institutional mission, such as instruction, research, and service, and weaves these objectives into the fabric of institutional priorities. Each institution also has its own objectives relating to diversity in recruiting, student affairs, and alumni relations. Be sure to understand what that broad strategic plan is so that you can work to achieve goals that support the existing initiatives.

   b. Once you have a strong understanding of the institution’s strategic plan for diversity, develop a plan for the office
      The CSO’s diversity initiatives must be aligned with the institutional mission and diversity plan. The CSO plan should include objectives specific to the goals and responsibilities of the CSO. Be sure to work closely with the CSO dean or director to develop a plan that is acceptable to office leadership.
2. **Have a Dedicated Diversity Professional**

   a. **Have a dedicated diversity professional position — or assign someone responsibility for managing the office diversity initiatives**

      Ideally the CSO will have a dedicated diversity professional who maintains the primary responsibility for managing diversity opportunities and for planning and implementing diversity initiatives. If the CSO does not — or cannot because of its structure — have a dedicated diversity professional, someone in the office should be tasked with the responsibility for managing diversity opportunities and events. This allows employers to have a consistent diversity point person and for students and other CSO advisors to have a resource for diversity-related information.

   b. **Develop a strategic plan for the diversity position**

      Be sure to prioritize initiatives based on how well they align with office and institutional strategy and goals. Remember that how much or how little responsibility gets assigned to the diversity role is a function of what percentage of the CSO representative’s responsibilities are dedicated to diversity. A full-time diversity professional can dedicate significantly more time and energy than one who is also tasked with other significant responsibilities.

3. **Identify and Develop Diversity Champions Internally**

   a. **Identify faculty and staff who are allies in diversity initiatives**

      Be sure to develop this network of supportive faculty and staff broadly. Do not assume either that only diverse faculty and staff will be interested, or that diverse faculty and staff necessarily will be interested. Where appropriate, provide opportunities for all faculty and staff to express interest and be involved in the diversity work of the CSO. Opportunities may include speaking engagements, mentorship programs, mock interview programs, and referrals for informational interviews.

   b. **Know the law school’s human resources professionals and be aware of diversity-oriented training opportunities**

      The human resources professionals should be plugged into the diversity resources of the greater university. Use these resources for training purposes or suggest collaboration between law school diversity initiatives and the diversity initiatives of the greater university or its other professional schools to maximize the use of funds and increase the scope of the initiatives.
This type of collaboration also teaches students valuable cross-profession networking skills.

4. **Collaborate with Other Departments and Support Diversity Initiatives at All Levels of the Law School**

   a. **Student recruitment**

      i. *Participate in receptions and recruiting events directed at diverse candidates*

         The office of student recruitment may hold several events specifically targeted at recruiting diverse students. Whenever possible attend these events. Prospective students benefit from knowing that diversity is not just sought after in the admissions process but is valued and supported at all stages of the law school experience.

      ii. *Participate in 1L orientation*

         If possible, be an active participant in fall orientation. Attend school-sponsored orientation events for diverse students and attend the beginning-of-the-year social events of the affinity student organizations. Again, this sends the message to students that the CSO is supportive of diversity throughout law school. This time can also be used to begin to familiarize diverse students with the wealth of opportunities that are available to them and provide a general timeline for these opportunities.

   b. **Financial aid**

      i. *Communicate scholarship opportunities to financial aid*

         It is important that the financial aid office be made aware of scholarships awarded to students. In some cases scholarship providers require that funds be directly deposited with the school. Additionally, students often seek the assistance of the financial aid office when seeking out scholarship opportunities. If these opportunities are communicated to the financial aid office, students have a better chance of hearing about them.

      ii. *Be aware of any internal funding programs that may exist for diverse students*

         At some schools internal scholarship opportunities exist. Sometimes scholarship awards can be adjusted upward for stellar academic performance. Be aware of how the law school’s financial aid system
works so you can guide students who may be eligible for additional financial aid awards.

c. Dean of Students

i. Work closely with the Dean of Students to identify both high-performing and at-risk diverse students

The Dean of Students is tasked with managing the law school experience of all students. At most schools this includes assisting students who appear to be struggling. Be familiar with the process of recommending students for additional assistance and with some of the resources that exist for this purpose. You may find that students who come to know you through their CSO-related counseling appointments share non-career related issues with you. In some cases you will need help in handling those issues — or those issues may need urgent attention. The ability to quickly and accurately refer the student to additional services — or to receive support for the CSO role — may be crucial to helping a student who is dealing with an emergency. Also be aware of programs, awards, or other forms of recognition that exist for exceptional students, and recommend students who fit the eligibility requirements for such awards.

ii. Work with the office of the Dean of Students to plan and promote events for diverse students

The Dean of Students’ office often also manages the student life programming on campus. Whenever possible offer to represent the CSO at these events. The more visible the efforts of the CSO are on campus, the more likely students are to take advantage of the opportunities that exist for them.

iii. Understand the institution’s policy regarding the release of student contact information to non-law school entities

Employers and bar associations often like to reach out to affinity student groups directly, but law school policies on releasing student information vary. Some schools allow individual student email addresses to be released; others have generic organizational email addresses that are public; and still others allow outside entities to post information on job boards or in other public areas but don’t provide access to student contact information. Whatever the law school policy, be sure you consistently communicate the policy to employers and others, along with tips for successful communication with the school’s affinity groups.
iv. *If the diversity position includes a liaison function to affinity student organizations, keep in contact with the Dean of Students with respect to organization operations, issues, concerns, or successes*

Although the liaison role may vary each year based on the current leadership of affinity organizations, the relationship with the Dean of Students should be constant. Open and frequent communication about the liaison efforts with the Dean of Students’ office will help to facilitate a good relationship between the liaison and the student organizations. It is helpful to be aware of any funding or programming restrictions and any other rules and regulations in place for student organizations. Also, be sure to avoid over-involvement with student organizations. Because students are very busy, it is easy to assume the lion’s share of responsibility for an organization’s programming. Be sure to clearly delineate the liaison’s support role to avoid taking on responsibilities that should lie with the student leaders.

d. Alumni

Attend alumni events, particularly those that relate to diverse alumni. Help educate alumni on the institution’s current diversity efforts and ways in which alumni can be involved in those efforts. Invite enthusiastic alumni to events, including law school-sponsored CLE opportunities, whenever possible. Keep alumni in other cities involved by meeting with them when you travel and connecting them with students for informational interviews if possible. Be sure to check with the alumni and/or development office for bookkeeping requirements relating to contact with alumni and/or financial contributions to the law school.

e. Faculty

Communicate frequently with faculty on diversity initiatives. Be sure to invite them to the CSO programs and ask them to invite their colleagues in practice. If possible work with the faculty, and possibly student research assistants, to develop a bank of materials that incorporate diverse topics into law school course offerings (e.g., family law cases that involve LGBT couples). These supplemental materials can be made available to all faculty to incorporate into their regular course materials if they so choose.

f. Clinics

Work with the clinical programs to provide training to students participating in clinics on LGBT issues, cultural sensitivity, and other diversity-related topics. Be aware of any pipeline programs sponsored by the law school and participate if possible.
5. Build External Relationships

a. Network frequently with affinity bar associations locally, state-wide, and nationally

Affinity bar associations offer a wealth of opportunities and resources both to CSOs and students. Many offer scholarship, mentor, fellowship, and other opportunities that provide students with practical work experience and exposure to practicing lawyers. These organizations may also offer resources that can be used for training purposes, including safe space training or CLE programs. Become familiar with the various programs available through these organizations and with the bar’s target audience for the opportunities. Although these opportunities may define “diverse candidate” broadly, sometimes the organizations have a very specific target recipient in mind. Assisting in identifying great candidates who meet the organization’s goals will help to build the relationship between the school and the bar. Also, don’t be afraid to offer insight into programming or scholarship opportunities. Bar associations are managed by busy working professionals who may not have the time to think carefully about how best to spend their organization’s time and money and may not be plugged into current student trends. Insightful suggestions, especially if coupled with an offer to dedicate time to a project, may be well received. Remember that the dedication of time is often paid back in-kind.

b. Extend frequent invitations to campus events to speakers from supportive organizations

Remember to invite contacts from bar and other organizations to interact with your students. Despite busy schedules most practicing lawyers enjoy the opportunity to interact with students. Don’t be afraid to reach out to contacts to connect them with students for informational interviews and other similar opportunities.

6. Market

a. Have a full and complete understanding of the school’s diversity demographics and of the diversity of programs offered

Know the current demographic make-up of the student body. Information on faculty demographics and the demographics of non-JD programs (e.g., LL.M. or joint degree programs) can also be helpful. Don’t forget to be familiar with the school’s academic or programming diversity. If the school is offering the most innovative professional development curriculum, provides students with unique clinical opportunities, or requires practical skills or advanced writing
courses, know what those offerings are. Be prepared to market the diverse academic offerings as they relate to the objectives of the potential employers you are working with. Each employer has an idea of the skills their ideal candidates should have. If the school develops these skills through its diverse programs, draw the connections for the employer.

b. **Build specific, strategic relationships**

Many institutional impressions are developed through personal relationships. Whenever possible introduce contacts at external organizations to students and alumni who embody the institutional culture of both the law school and the target organization. Even if no employment relationship develops, this type of strategic relationship-building engenders goodwill for both the law school and the external organization.

7. **Communicate**

a. **Communicate with students**

Develop a system for communicating with students. Be creative and flexible. Students are inundated with information and sometimes tune out or miss even important information. Provide a forum for diversity information that students can rely on and access at their convenience. Consider various forms of social media, blogs, newsletters, or personal emails. Remember that you may need more than one method of disseminating information in order to reach a broader range of students, and your tactics may need to change as student communication preferences change. Be sure to market the diversity forum(s) so students are aware that they exist. Counseling sessions, personal interactions, and attendance at affinity group meetings are useful for this purpose.

b. **Communicate with others in the CSO to make them aware of opportunities for students and training opportunities for themselves**

c. **Communicate with others in the school when diversity opportunities that impact their roles become available**

Let financial aid know when scholarship opportunities arise; forward relevant diversity-related articles to faculty and staff who have expressed an interest in the issue.

d. **Communicate with external networks**

If you have a law student candidate who may be a good fit for an organization’s scholarship or mentorship opportunities, let the organization know — or simply bring a star student to the attention of decision makers.
within an employer organization. Keep contacts at external organizations updated with student trends or information particular to the organization’s mission. Adding value to external organizations and employers in this way will help keep the school and its students on an organization’s radar.

e. Communicate with your supervisor to keep him or her aware of the work you are doing and specifically of any successes or difficulties

It is always important to communicate regularly with your supervisor to make sure your efforts remain in line with the goals of the office and of the law school. Be sure to seek approval for budget expenditures and marketing campaigns. Also ask about institutional history that may impact the success of your efforts.

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