

Attracting black faculty is BALSA's 'paramount concern'

By David Snouffer

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Attracting more minority and women members to the Law School faculty is the "paramount concern" of the Black American Law Students' Association (BALSA), according to BALSA President Butch Hollowell.

While the Law School has several black part-time lecturers and one full-time black faculty member who is on leave, the law faculty includes no black full-time professors teaching in Charlottesville and only one full-time woman.

Hollowell said the current law faculty is "unwilling and unable" to address the needs of black students.

The lack of black faculty also hurts white students, he added, because it "reinforces the belief of non-minorities that perhaps blacks are not qualified" to teach law.

Last spring BALSA circulated petitions expressing support for the hiring of black professors at the Law School. Hollowell reported the petitions garnered over six hundred signatures, including a majority of law

students, ten faculty members, and two administrators.

Hollowell termed the widespread support for the petition a "compelling indictment" of the Law School's failure to attract more minority faculty.

Black faculty would allow black students to "establish a rapport" with them, Hollowell said. Such a rapport would help in developing a "mentor-



pupil relationship where ideas can be distilled and where black students can learn," Hollowell stated, adding that black professors could "serve as role models" for the students.

A black instructor, "by virtue of going through the black experience" would "have a different perspective about teaching the law," Hollowell explained. He added that diversity in

education is "the root of intellectual reasoning."

Noting that blacks and women together number a sizeable percentage of Americans, Hollowell said it was ironic that a "minority elite group" of white male law professors "impose opinions on the majority."

He added that the University has fallen behind U.S. Justice Department goals for minority hiring under the Virginia Plan.

The lack of black faculty also hurts the University's public reputation, in Hollowell's view.

Currently, he said, the University is "recognized as being a conservative law school...bent on economic analysis."

"Fundamental concepts of minority participation and rights are not articulated here" as well as they are at comparable institutions where black professors give "unquantifiable inspiration" to their black students, he said.

Hollowell noted that more minority faculty could improve a curriculum which he said now is "just

incredibly poor." The lack of courses on civil rights and liberties is "an embarrassment," he said.

Student Bar Association President Tom Byrne, noted that the SBA last spring passed a resolution to "back up" BALSA efforts to recruit more black faculty.

Byrne said that black faculty will allow students to discuss their problems "with someone with whom he feels comfortable...who has already experienced similar problems or who at least understands the problems." Law School education generally is "strenuous," he added.

Byrne said he also sees a "big demand" for more civil rights courses. A black faculty member would likely know more about civil rights subjects, he commented.

Hollowell said Law School administrators may not be working hard enough to attract available blacks qualified to teach law.

"We [BALSA] know about qualified black people out there," he stated. "One begins to wonder whether

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Journal File photo

BALSA president
Butch Hollowell

BALSA

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the administration and the faculty are sensitive to black students and want to see them perform," he remarked.

"They have [white male] professors here who they've paid an arm and a leg for because of their supposed credentials, when they don't have good teaching skills," he noted.

"For the price that they offer some of these other professors," Hollowell said, Law School administrators can attract "all the black professors that they need."

But Keith Harrison, chairman of BALSAs Faculty Recruitment Committee, is less certain that the Law School has not allocated enough money toward hiring black faculty.

"I'd hate to make the assumption that they're offering them [potential black faculty] less than their market

worth." He pointed out, however, "I don't know for a fact that they have been going out and recruiting" blacks.

Harrison emphasized that BALSAs can play a major role in the effort to attract blacks to the law faculty. "We have to convince people that the University of Virginia is somewhere that they'd like to further their educational goals," he stated.

BALSAs members can show black candidates "that there are black students here that are interested in learning from them both as role models and experts in certain areas," he added.

Harrison said BALSAs can also help identify potential black faculty candidates as recruiting targets. "We want to work with the faculty toward the goal of diversity," he noted.

Harrison admitted that hiring more blacks will not be easy, "The pool is

limited, especially at the highest levels of that pool, and we [at the University] are going to bumping heads with the highest institutions in the country," he explained.

He said another problem is that law school recruiters traditionally have "set some artificial barriers up" which limit the number of black candidates they can consider.

He said Law School administrators may be considering only blacks who "have the highest credentials," overlooking others who "may not have the glowing credentials but are still qualified to teach."

For example, Harrison said many Law School members and candidates have clerked for Supreme Court justices, but he said only a "handful of blacks" have done so.

In order to find other candidates with a "commitment to teaching,"

Law School recruiters will need to use "creativity" and "imagination," he observed, adding that BALSAs can help in this progress.

Byrne said he thinks the law faculty "is very much behind the idea of BALSAs helping to recruit black faculty."

He believes a major obstacle to attracting new blacks to the faculty is the current lack of black professors.

"There has to be a particularly large [recruitment] push right now," Byrne commented, explaining that once blacks joined the faculty, others would see that they would "feel welcome" at the University.

Byrne also said he doubts if black candidates are not being offered enough money. "A black faculty [member] would be paid the same as a white faculty [member] in the same position," he stated.