



Essay from the President

A Thoughtful Path to Diversity for the College

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We find ourselves in extraordinary times, as individuals and as an organization. Among many other things, this spring saw the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and

other Black Americans, propelling the Black Lives Matter movement and bringing racial and other diversity considerations to the forefront. You may have noticed that the College did not issue an affirmative statement at that time setting forth our commitment to diversity and inclusion for all. This is not because we do not have that commitment – quite the opposite. We felt that actions speak louder than words, and that making sure we are taking the right actions, and then talking about those actions, is a better direction for an honorary public service association like the College. The Board met in October and spoke at length about this important issue.

The first step in addressing a problem is defining it. Our Chair Mark Bloom observed that the College currently defines diversity narrowly in its official recordkeeping - gender, geography by circuit, and areas of the profession. It has often been posited that, "That which is measured, improves." Would compiling racial, ethnic, gender identification and other statistics be feasible and helpful to our efforts?

We can make a difference through the Fellows we induct and the individuals we honor. As described in Charlie Beckham's column, Class 32 includes thirty-six percent women (compared to twenty-two percent for the College overall) and six new racially

diverse Fellows. As highlighted by Claudia Springer in our October all-Fellows meeting, five of our six Distinguished Students this year were women, and one a person of color. Two of our recent Distinguished Service Award winners have been women. How can we continue to use our organization's honorary capacity to drive improvement?

What does our own leadership look like? As the second female President of the College, I am privileged to be a member of the first Executive Committee on which women are in the majority -- of the eight senior officers of the College, five are women. Seven of the fifteen members of the Board of Regents are women or persons of color. While we are proud of our progress, we need to do more to promote diversity throughout our boards and committees.

I am convinced that structural impediments limit racially diverse individuals' access to the necessary educational opportunities and professional development. To increase the pool of candidates, we need to help minorities gain the academic foundation, opportunity and experience to succeed as bankruptcy attorneys and professionals. How can we structure our educational programs and professional development to support that goal? Can the College be a forum through which our Fellows can identify deserving candidates early, and then provide support and guidance to these professionals as they progress in their careers?

Much of the pro bono work supported by the Foundation benefits underserved populations; income inequality and economic hardship disproportionately affect

continued on page 21



President's Message continued from page 4

people of color. And as previously announced by Paul Harner and Judge Bostwick, the Foundation's 2020 Michael L. Cook Extraordinary Grant was awarded to the QLaw Foundation of Washington, which focuses on the special needs of the gay, lesbian, and transgender communities. Are there other ways our funds can be focused on addressing these societal issues? Should we be broadening the scope of grants by the Foundation beyond pro bono legal service programs to do so?

The College plays a significant role in influencing the perception of our profession. Diversity should be considered in how we record history through the Archives, how we chronicle our activities in newsletters, the website and public forums, and how we shape the future through the legislation we support. Are the images we project and the

values we reflect, both within and outside our organization, ones that are consistent with this objective?

These are not easy questions, and we have decided to appoint a Diversity Committee charged with answering them, and others that our Fellows raise. We are in the process of forming that committee now and would welcome volunteers who would like to be a part of those efforts in any capacity. We want to listen to our Fellows' ideas and put them into action.

Whether attributed to Voltaire, Churchill or Peter Parker's Uncle Ben, it is a truism that, "With great power comes great responsibility." We at the College have the power to make a difference. Diversity is not an issue for a moment, but a mindfulness that should be ingrained in everything we do, now and in the future. Thank you all for being a part of this mindfulness. ¶