

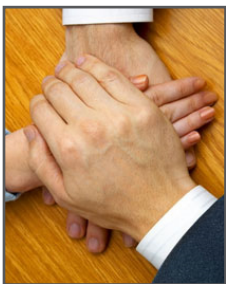


Feature

Alumni Associations Keep Ties Strong to Alma Mater

By Anayat Durrani

On graduation day, misty-eyed students say their goodbyes to friends, professors, and some long, hard years of law school. While many disappear into the workforce, others choose to stay close to their schools through alumni associations and find that participation often leads to better business networks, avenues to pursue pro bono and other community activities, and ways to reconnect with that intellectual curiosity and joy in the law that sometimes get lost after years of practice.



Andrew Sinclair is one of them. Mr. Sinclair graduated from Boston University School of Law last May, and although he has not yet participated in any alumni events, he said he plans to be involved with his school's alumni association.

"I'm definitely interested in my school's alumni association as a way to keep in touch with classmates and perhaps to find business and employment opportunities," said Mr. Sinclair. "I also plan to participate in other activities at my school, such as the mentor program."

Law school alumni sponsor a wide range of events such as mixers, reunions, lectures, fundraisers, seminars, and other functions providing alumni opportunities to stay in touch and reconnect.

"The UMKC Law Alumni Association serves as a catalyst to maintain the ties between graduates and their peers and their school of law," said Paula Yehle, Advancement Manager, Executive Director, Law Foundation, University of Missouri Kansas City School of Law. "The Law Alumni Association annually recognizes and promotes the achievements of both students and alumni and provides social opportunities for alumni to connect with each other."

Mary Brown moved out of state after graduating from the University of San Diego School of Law in 1997. But before she left, she made sure to attend one of her alumni association events. "It was a new lawyer's mixer, and I had a great time catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. I only wish I lived closer to keep some of those connections."

Though Ms. Brown now lives too far away to participate in her school's events, she said she does value the information she receives about her old classmates. Much of that

information comes in the form of magazines published by law school alumni associations, which update alum about fellow graduates, faculty, and events..

"Our magazine, like other school magazines, is really our way of communicating the scholarly activities occurring at the school," said Jeffrey A. Ulmer, who serves as Assistant Dean, Development and Alumni Relations, at Vanderbilt University Law School. "It also provides news about our alumni, and it's really our primary marketing piece. It goes to alumni as well as other academic administrators and faculty at our peer institutions."

However, apart from the occasional networking opportunity and chance to meet old classmates, not everyone is interested in their alumni association. Nadia Keilani, a 1997 graduate of the University of San Diego School of Law, said she is not at all involved with her alumni. "I'm not really interested in maintaining contact with the association. The friends I made in law school are still my friends, and except for those that are in private practice and need to drum up business, none are involved in the alumni association."

Still, for others, remaining in touch with their schools has pushed them to become active members of their school's alumni associations. These alumni view it as a way of giving back to their school and to keep their law school experience alive.

Stuart Butzier, '89, is the current president of the University of New Mexico School of Law Alumni Association. He serves on an alumni board that currently numbers 30 members. "I think those of us who serve on the alumni association are motivated by positive experiences each of us had in law school and by the sense of pride and commitment to 'give back' to the institution that helped us to achieve professionally."

Cerianne L. Mullins, '95, a past president of the UNM School of Law Alumni Association, said she remains a board member as a way to stay in touch with her law school.



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“Serving on the board not only brings me back to campus every month for board meetings, but has allowed me to meet people currently working at or attending UNM Law School, to connect with other graduates of UNM Law School, and to stay up-to-date on issues pertinent to the law school,” she said.

UNM’s three annual alumni events show that alumni activities can stimulate the mind, raise money, and offer ways to have fun while networking. The association sponsors an annual distinguished service award dinner in the fall to honor three outstanding members of the law school community and legal profession. The 2004 dinner, which also served as a fundraiser, drew 500 attendees. The other two events include a high-profile lecture series sponsored by the law school and other sponsoring organizations, as well as an annual golf tournament at one of Albuquerque’s many golf courses.

Providing mentoring to incoming law students is also a major service several law school alumni associations provide, among others.

“We have implemented and are continuing to sponsor a mentoring program between Loyola students and alumni. There were over 100 students in the program for the 2003-2004 school year alone,” said Michael J. Conway, ‘95, president of the board of governors for the Loyola Law School Alumni Association, which boasts more than 12,000 members.

Mr. Conway said the alumni association plans a number of events, such as the annual Grand Reunion, which sold 652 tickets last year. They also hold two or three networking events per month throughout the year. They sponsor good-cause events like the Young Lawyers Program and Bob Cooney Golf Tournament, which benefits the Cancer Legal Resource Center located on the Loyola Law School campus.

“We are continuing to work with the Career Services Department to help alumni find their first jobs or transition

their practices. One of our newest projects is spearheading a program at Loyola involving Pro Bono Adoption Day that brings together Loyola students and alumni to help finalize adoptions,” said Mr. Conway.

Though alumni events often occur near the school’s campus, many alumni associations work toward holding events nationwide as a way to increase networking opportunities and maintain strong ties with their far-flung alums.

“We hold alumni receptions across New Mexico and in other states where we have alums,” said Herb Wright, Director of Development & Alumni Affairs at the University of New Mexico School of Law. “These receptions are attended by faculty, alums, and students. The students use these events as a way to network with those alums who reside in a city or state where they are interested in working.”

Bruce Toth graduated from Stanford University Law School in 1980 and is currently the chair of the Stanford Law Society of Chicago, which holds three events each year. Two are professional events that include hosting a reception for Stanford Law Dean Larry Kramer and the third is focused on socializing. The society also assists in the recruiting of new students and provides resources for current students.

Mr. Toth said that around 15 years or so after graduation, many graduates take it upon themselves to reconnect with the law school experience. “It may be nothing more than an irritating call to solicit money for the school or an invitation to hear a law school professor that is in town to speak on a current topic. Regardless, it allows graduates to start thinking about how much they miss the law school experience,” said Mr. Toth. “For those graduates looking to reconnect with the law school it is a ready resource that helps that effort.”

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