



Feature

## Law Association Clubs Serve Many Purposes

By Anayat Durrani

Every law campus has a multitude of student law associations representing every cause and group imaginable. These student organizations serve a variety of needs, from supporting an important issue to networking to just plain socializing.



“Students can benefit from having student organization membership as well as leadership positions on their resume,” said Terri Praszkie, Assistant Dean at Saint Louis University School of Law. “This can provide opportunities for good discussion during interviews, which

help hiring partners get to know the law student and can, in some instances, allow prospective employers the chance to learn what issues are important to the law student—i.e., Environmental Law Society, Public Interest Law Group, etc.”

Not all student groups, however, are activist. Some simply provide a way to enjoy life outside of classes and network. Still, these groups can enhance one’s resume too.

For example, Student Lawyer Athletic Program (SLAP) at NYU School of Law focuses on love of sports. Sunil Suri is a past president of SLAP, which is the largest student group at the law school, with about 150-200 members in any given year, according to him. “There is a very popular and competitive flag football league in the fall, and people meet up for pick-up softball in the spring. SLAP is also responsible for fielding teams for the annual law school softball tournament at the University of Virginia law school in April.”

Though the group revolves mainly around athletic and social activities, it also serves as a great networking opportunity among those who share the same interest in sports. Suri said he includes student law clubs on his resume to show his range of interests, which he believes appeals to hiring partners for several reasons. “They might want to see if you will fit into the ‘office culture’ of that employer, you are a social person [which is] very important for client contact, you have an active/healthy lifestyle, you are able to juggle many things in your life at once, and you have leadership abilities.”

Suri said several employers have commented on his

participation and leadership in SLAP, some of whom were NYU alums who were past members of the club. He said others who showed interest included JAG interviewers who value athletic participation in their hiring process.

In contrast, some student organizations are dedicated to a specific cause. David J. Tsai is president of the Bisexual Gay Lesbian Advocates (BGLAd) at Santa Clara University School of Law, an organization founded to “bring greater awareness and acceptance of diversity” to the campus. Tsai said organizations like his can build “activist” coalitions that can lead to change within the law school.

“BGLAd brings forward legal issues, such as military recruitment of non-gays and same-sex marriage, which might not be traditionally discussed within the regular classroom curriculum. Members are able to learn about the most up-to-date rulings and laws enacted related to the LGBT community,” explained Mr. Tsai. “Most recently, we had a celebration of Judge Kramer’s decision in S.F. finding the ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional. In just one hour, we collected over 90 signatures petitioning Governor Schwarzenegger against the proposed California State Amendment banning same-sex marriage.”

And then some groups provide a way to connect with and find support from students of similar ethnic, racial, or religious backgrounds. Angela Ompoc is co-president of the Asian Pacific American Law Students’ Association (APALSA) at Santa Clara University School of Law and stresses the importance of support. “In law school, support is probably the most vital thing to survival,” said Ompoc. “Student clubs like APALSA provide a resource of support; they provide a group of students in the same situation of being in law school and, in APALSA’s case, of being Asian.”

Angela Espada, Associate Dean for Student Services and Admissions at Indiana University School of Law, thinks students can get a lot out of student organizations. She said



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they are important learning experiences, can help get students acquainted with colleagues, and broaden one's area of interest to a focus different from class and studying. "I think some employers will view membership as an indication that employees are sociable and interested in expanding an area of interest," she said.

But just how important is involvement in a law association club to a hiring partner?

Kathy Patterson is a hiring partner for Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe—a 700-lawyer, 13-practice area law firm. Patterson said that involvement in law student organizations can prove valuable on a resume. "We are interested in all information about potential associates that helps us to understand their skills, interests, and abilities."

However, Patterson advised that students who wish to take part in a student association should be sure to make good use of their participation. "A student who considers participating in a student association should consider it as more than a resume-building opportunity and should actively participate or seek leadership opportunities in the association. A laundry list of 'memberships' without more is unlikely to enhance a candidacy."

As such, someone like Trent Crable—chair of the Native American Law Students' Association (NALSA) at the University of Michigan Law School, who had an area of interest that he found not well represented at his school, but who did something about it— might be highly interesting to a future employer.

"The field of Indian law is relatively small and tightly knit, so networking is vital," said Crable. "While in school, NALSA is one of the few places I've been able to network with practitioners in the area of my interest."

Indeed, as chair of NALSA, Crable helps NALSA members attend Indian law conferences, participate in the National NALSA Moot Court Competition, perform community service, and bring speakers to the law school to address these issues—all vital parts of networking in such a specialized field.

Similarly, Krista L. Patterson, co-chair of the Women Law Students' Association at Duke University School of Law, works to ensure that WLSA provides students with networking opportunities and valuable learning experiences through speaker and roundtable discussions. In addition, Ms. Patterson sees involvement in student associations as a forum to exercise and develop leadership skills.

Sounding like a hiring partner, Patterson said, "It is even more effective to include club leadership positions on resumes. I think hiring partners care about student participation in clubs to the extent that it shows their involvement in their academic environment and their dedication to getting the most out of law school."

She couldn't be more right. Don't be just a joiner of clubs; be a leader in the clubs you join. With so many clubs out there, that means picking one or two clubs that are important to you and to which you can contribute so you can get the most out of the experience and show employers you can go deep on a subject.

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