

LAW WEEK COLORADO

Creating A Blizzard Of Diverse Lawyers

By Ali McNally
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No two snowflakes are alike

and neither are candidates for careers in Colorado's legal profession. But the profession remains predominantly white and male. Today, *Law Week* examines what's being done to encourage minority students, some as young as elementary school to consider legal careers. We also look at pilot programs launched last year to bring more diversity to legal staffs, and we sit in on a diversity panel sponsored by the Association of Corporate Counsel and the Center for Legal Inclusiveness. PAGES 4-6

Some of Colorado's youngest legal minds aren't studying at the library for the bar exam or at law firms doing research. In fact, many don't even have their driver's licenses yet.

Since its beginnings in 2008, the Denver Urban Debate League nearly tripled in size and is now hosted at 11 public schools in Denver.

"It builds confidence, self esteem and they're doing the heavy-lifting by researching the major issues of our time," said Catherine Smith, the diversity dean at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law.

The urban debate league partners with the law school, which houses the organization's executive director and provides resources to students. DU also offers use of its library and access to Westlaw and other databases to help urban debate league students with research.

The league is just one program aimed at making sure Colorado has a bigger pool of minorities and women interested in legal careers. Another is the state's Pledge To Diversity, which focuses on diverse first-year law students.

"We want the students to view the law school as part of the community," said DU's Smith, who is involved in both. Speaking of the debate league, she said, "The law students are being trained as coaches and volunteers. Instead of having a fleeting relationship with students, we're trying to build a long-term relationship to support them with whatever they want to do in life."

Law school 'an option'

DU's involvement isn't solely aimed at getting students to go to law school, but rather expose it to them as an option. The program also offers opportunities for low-cost SAT, ACT and LSAT preparation courses.

But students don't just have to make a trip to DU. Many can take advantage of similar opportunities at their own schools,



DU Diversity Dean Catherine Smith | LAW WEEK PHOTO JAMIE COTTEN

and it isn't just for the geeks. In its first year, the debate league team at the Denver Center for International Studies grew from six students to 22.

The team gets assistance from Holland & Hart attorney Giji John, a high school debate veteran who meets with team members twice a week to help them practice for tournaments. John gives debaters pointers on structuring arguments, keeping pace with time limits and presentation. Although he doesn't expect to persuade kids as young as 14 to go to law school, John knows debate team helps show students that it's a viable option after college.

"You're building a bigger pool of kids going to college," he said. "Debate, too, is an activity that's not very different from practicing law, because they're learning to make arguments and present them."

Sara Hirsch, a teacher at Denver Center for International Studies who assists in heading the school's debate club, said, "Our students are taught to stand up and speak their ideas, so debate is a natural segue."

Law school sounds like light years away, but Denver Center for International Studies sophomore Marina Urquhart said

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