

Student Education Admission to the Bar Committee

Mentoring Initiatives Working Group Report

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I. Introduction

The Mentoring Initiatives Working Group was tasked with devising a mentoring program for law students that SEABC can undertake in the coming year. The group was instructed to consider partnerships with the YLD Law Students Division, Standing Committee on Professionalism, and all Florida Law Schools. This Report lays out the working group's recommendations for developing a mentoring program for law students supported by SEABC.

The working group recommends that SEABC and the Bar:

- (1) Work with the Law Student Division of the Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division to further develop their existing mentoring program.**
 - a. Provide administrative support in order to centralize the matching of students to lawyers.**
 - b. Encourage buy-in and participation by attorneys.**
 - c. Provide incentives to encourage mentoring relationships.**

- (2) Participate in programs that bring attorneys on Florida law school campuses to talk about the professionalism and the soft skills required in the practice of law.**

II. Working Group Observations on Mentoring Programs

Members of the working group considered the types of standard mentoring programs that were successful and that they had found most valuable. Some of the factors they identified were: (1) matching mentors and mentees that had similar expectations of the program; (2) setting concrete expectations for the mentoring relationship, for instance setting specific activities or tasks that must be completed by the mentor and mentee on set timelines; and (3) providing incentives for mentors and mentees to participate and maximize their relationships. The working group members also identified issues they had encountered in mentoring programs including: (1) lack of student motivation and involvement in developing the mentoring relationships; (2) lack of a clear directives or expectations for the program; and (3) programs failed to reach students who may not be aware of or be willing to sign up for the program.

The working group concluded that SEABC should support the most effective traditional mentoring programs while seeking out non-traditional ways to reach broad groups of law students.

III. Recommended Programs

a. Traditional Mentoring: Support the Law Student Division Mentoring Program.

The working group observed that the Law Student Division of the Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division had worked over the past year to revamp the statewide mentoring program for law students. The Program has been redesigned to (1) set clear expectations for mentors and mentees and (2) more precisely match mentors and mentees in terms of expectations for the program and personal compatibility. As part of this effort, the mentoring program application for both mentors and mentees is more robust, requiring a bit more commitment from a prospective participant. The working group recommends that SEABC work with the Law Students Division to develop and expand the revamped mentoring program.

The Bar can assist in three primary ways: (1) Provide administrative support in order to centralize the matching of students to lawyers; (2) Encourage buy-in and participation by attorneys; (3) Provide incentives to encourage mentoring relationships. The Bar's administrative support would create institutional memory for the program. As the program is run by the Law Students Division, there is constant turnover in the management of the process of matching law students with interested lawyers. The Law Students Division could use the assistance of the Bar's administrative staff in running the program so as to prevent the current situation where management of the program has to be handed over to a new student every 2-3 years. The mentoring program could be housed in one of the Bar's centers and, the Law Students Division and the Young Lawyers Division would continue to be tasked with overall management of the program. The program also needs assistance with recruiting lawyer mentors. In the past, the Law Student Division has had large numbers of students interested in the program but many fewer lawyers. SEABC should work with the Bar and its committees and sections and law school alumni groups to attract more lawyers to participate in the program. If the Bar demonstrates its support for the program and promotes the program, more lawyers will get involved. Finally, through promotion of the program and recognizing successful mentoring relationships, the Bar can create incentives for lawyer involvement in the program. The Bar can use its media platforms to highlight the benefits of the mentoring program and may also consider providing token recognition of mentors through some kind of award.

b. Non-Traditional Mentoring and Outreach: Bring Lawyers into Law Schools for More Encounters with Students

The working group also observed that there remains a need for mentoring-type initiatives of a more general and less traditional nature for students or lawyers who may not have the time for a traditional mentoring relationship or may otherwise be unable to participate in those type of activities. The program could also serve to further the Bar's mission of introducing law students to the importance of professionalism in the practice of law. The working group recommends working with the Florida law schools to develop programs and support their existing programs that bring speakers to campus to discuss professionalism, varying practice areas and ways to practice law, and the "soft skills" of legal practice—from dressing for the interview to developing business.

Law schools are constantly looking for opportunities for their students to engage with the attorneys who can impart practical advice about the practice of law and expose them to a variety of practice areas. One of our working group members, Ron Kozlowski, participated in the University of Florida Levin College of Law's Spring Career Conference on behalf of SEABC and spoke to students on the topic of "Finding a Job and Excelling in the Legal Profession." The program was very successful. Where schools do not have preset programs, working group members proposed the concept of "Finishing School" discussion series where lawyers could discuss the realities of practicing and provide advice on excelling in the profession. Topics would include: appropriate cellphone use; interviews; corresponding with opposing counsel and the judiciary; presentation in the work place; going to a meal, and networking once you have the job.

The buy-in and involvement of the law schools is crucial to the success of this type of initiative as they are most well-placed to understand the needs of their students and the best way to encourage participation. Suggested formats for these programs included: (1) meetings at set intervals with students selected by the law students; (2) preset programing in a discussion format, for instance, a table of 8 dinner, rather than a traditional lecture format; (3) integrate discussions into existing programs. SEABC members from around the state could serve as liaisons to the law schools and work with them to develop a format that works best for their students.

IV. Conclusion

These programs can serve as an initial foundation for developing a strong mentoring initiative across The Florida Bar. The working group looks forward to working with SEABC to implement these initiatives in the 2018-2019 Bar year.