

INTRODUCING
THE GSU LAW
SBA DIVERSITY COMMITTEE
AND THE BLSA WOMEN LEADING ITS SUCCESS



In Spring 2021, the student body voted to create the position of the Student Bar Association Diversity and Inclusion Officer (SBA D&I).

Adelarín Yemi-Sofumade (right), 3LP, was appointed as the inaugural SBA D&I Officer and Chair of the Diversity Committee. Davynn Brown (left), 3L, is the Vice-Chair, and the committee is full of amazing, enthusiastic GSU Law students.

Exclusive
Interview
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PICTURED (L - R): AMY MCCARTHY, DIRECTOR OF THE GSU COL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CAREER STRATEGIES; TANYA MONIQUE WASHINGTON, GSU COL PROFESSOR OF LAW & BLSA ADVISOR; TAMEKA LESTER, GSU COL ASSOCIATE CLINICAL PROFESSOR & INTERIM ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS; KAT TAYLOR, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) DIRECTOR TO NELSON MULLINS LLP; ADELARIN YEMI-SOFUMADE, GSU COL 3LP, SBA D&I OFFICER AND CHAIR OF THE SBA DIVERSITY COMMITTEE; CAROLINE ABNEY, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND D&I TO KING & SPALDING; JAMILA HALL, PARTNER AND D&I CHAIR TO JONES DAY; SARAH MAHMOOD, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR TO THE GSU COL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CAREER STRATEGIES.

ON NOVEMBER 3, 2021, THE DIVERSITY COMMITTEE PARTNERED WITH THE COL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO HOST THREE INCREDIBLE TRAILBLAZERS IN BIG LAW AT THE “DIVERSITY IN THE LEGAL SPACE” PANEL: KAT TAYLOR, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) DIRECTOR TO NELSON MULLINS LLP; JAMILA HALL, PARTNER AND D&I CHAIR TO JONES DAY; AND CAROLINE ABNEY, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND D&I TO KING & SPALDING. THE PANELISTS SHARED THEIR BACKGROUNDS AND CAREER TRAJECTORIES INTO THE D&I SPACE, THEIR FIRMS’ COMMITMENTS TO D&I INITIATIVES, AND THEY ADVISED OUR STUDENTS ON WHY THEY SHOULD AND HOW THEY CAN BE D&I ADVOCATES PRESENTLY AND IN THEIR FUTURE ORGANIZATIONS. THE GSU COL STUDENT BODY PARTICULARLY ENJOYED AND APPRECIATED THE PANELISTS INSIGHTS ON HOW GSU STUDENTS CAN CREATE AND SHOULD MAXIMIZE THEIR PERSONAL BRANDS AS THEY FORGE THROUGH THEIR LEGAL CAREERS.

THE GSU LAW SBA DIVERSITY COMMITTEE WAS FORMALLY INCORPORATED THIS FALL (2021). PLEASE INTRODUCE OUR READERS TO THE COMMITTEE. WHAT IS THE DIVERSITY COMMITTEE? WHAT ARE ITS GOALS AND INITIATIVES?

The committee is an expansion of the SBA. Our primary goal is to support the professional development of the diverse student body of Georgia State University College of Law (GSU COL). As we all know, diversity manifests in many forms: race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, traditional vs. non-traditional students and more. Tactically, we promote the interests of diverse law students in all legal arenas, especially in big law and clerkships, and work to resolve any need or issue affecting the communities of the student body. We also collaborate with other student organizations as necessary to further diversity and inclusion at the College of Law. This means purposely targeting these communities and combating barriers that they may face trying to enter certain areas of the law by dispersing information and creating opportunities for connection.

HOW CAN STUDENTS (BLSA AND NON-BLSA), ALUMNI AND THEIR RESPECTIVE FIRMS GET INVOLVED WITH D&I AT THE GSU COL?

Diverse students should participate and take advantage of the events to network and promote their interests. They can also reach out to any member of the committee to discuss any issues affecting the diverse law student body. Law firms and other legal organizations can partner with us to promote the opportunities and D&I initiatives at their organizations. Law associations can partner with and sponsor some of our events.

MANY PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF THE AMAZING SUCCESS OF THE DIVERSITY COMMITTEE'S FIRST MAJOR EVENT, DIVERSITY IN THE LEGAL SPACE. AS A PRECURSOR TO FUTURE EVENTS PRESENTED BY THE COMMITTEE, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THAT EVENT?

We have quite a few initiatives planned for next semester. We are planning events partnering with members of the judiciary, coaching on bias and microaggressions, coaching directed at first-generation law students, networking events with attorneys from different facets of the legal industry like law firms, in-house, solo practitioners etc. We have listened to the issues that other committee members have raised and want to do our best to fill the gaps that they see.



ADELARIN YEMI-SOFUMADE



MANY GSU COL STUDENTS, AND NOW READERS OF THIS ARTICLE, ARE AWARE OF THE AMAZING SUCCESS OF THE DIVERSITY COMMITTEE'S FIRST MAJOR EVENT, DIVERSITY IN THE LEGAL SPACE. AS A PRECURSOR TO FUTURE EVENTS PRESENTED BY THE COMMITTEE, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THAT EVENT?

Ultimately, the law industry is a consumer-focused industry, and besides resume fillers like grades, the most important thing diverse law students can do is to create an authentic personal brand and capitalize on it by networking, networking, and networking. One panelist said and I paraphrase: "when I need an associate on a job, I'm not thinking about what their grade was in their contracts class. I'm thinking of who has made an impression." Most of us did not grow up being family-friends or neighbors with a Chief Justice or partner somewhere, but we still have to be able to make the necessary connections to get into those spaces.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO BECOME A LEADER IN THE D&I SPACE WITH THE COLLEGE OF LAW? HOW DOES YOUR ROLE INTERSECT WITH YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND BLACK WOMEN LAW STUDENTS?

Although I have dual Nigerian-U.S. citizenship, I was born and raised in Nigeria where I was in the racial majority. After my family relocated back to the U.S., I remember the culture shock of being one of the few black women in my classes at Georgia Institute of Technology and the feelings of being isolated and unsupported in some learning spaces. This trend continued throughout my career in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related industries where caucasian males dominated and the number of women or diverse candidates represented reduced with each rung of the leadership ladder I climbed. Regrettably, this trend continues even as I transition into the Law industry. I was one of only two black women in a class of fourteen at my last summer internship at a big law firm here in Atlanta and the only student from GSU. Currently, I am one of only two black students on GSU COL Law Review out of a membership of sixty-seven students. When the SBA D&I leadership opportunity came up, I decided that it was my opportunity to promote the career interests of diverse and especially black law students like me, so that the law spaces I find myself would not be so exclusive, but rather inclusive of bright black students like me. I have found that diverse representation exponentially increases the thought capacity of any organization, its effectiveness in developing and retaining its people, and its ability to deliver on business goals. I am passionate about diversity and inclusion, especially as it affects equity and fairness, because I have personally experienced the negative consequences of feeling invisible and powerless within a system. I also recognize the positive individual and organizational impacts that can be made when leadership power is applied in the right measures, at the right times, towards the right, equitable goals.