
**NORTH CAROLINA BAR ASSOCIATION
YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION
MINORITY FOCUS COMMITTEE
MINORITY LEGAL SYMPOSIUM PROJECT**

I. Project Description

The Minority Focus Committee is a new committee that was created last year with both an internal and external mandate. Its charge is to focus on the needs and concerns affecting minorities and women in the legal profession and for its members to partner with organizations in North Carolina's increasingly diverse communities to serve the needs of North Carolina's minority citizens. Through this particular project, the committee sponsors two minority legal symposiums: one, focused on the needs and concerns of minority law students entering the legal profession and another, focused on the needs and concerns of young minority lawyers already practicing in the profession. The minority student legal symposium features discussions on topics such as: "Landing Your First Legal Job;" "Managing Law School Debt;" "Bar Exam Preparation;" and "Starting Your Own Law Practice." The young practitioners' symposium features discussions on topics such as: "Retention of Minorities and Females in the Law"; "The Success of Minorities and Females on the Partner Track;" and "Balancing Your Legal Career with Your Family."

Past panelists for the symposium have included members from the North Carolina Board of Law Examiners, North Carolina Leaf (loan forbearance organization), local law school career service counselors, and practitioners from all over the state, including a Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge, North Carolina Secretary of Crime Control, a local District Attorney and President of the North Carolina Young Lawyers Division.

II. Project Planning/Development

A. Identification of Need

The Minority Legal Symposium was conceived at the 2002-2003 annual planning retreat of the North Carolina Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division. The Minority Focus Committee was originally named the Minority History Committee and was formed to create a documentary project to preserve the history of those minority members of the North Carolina Bar Association who have made significant contributions to the profession. At the 2002-2003 planning retreat, the Minority History Committee was merged with the Hispanic/Latino Task Force to form the Minority Focus Committee. At that same retreat, we conducted a brainstorming session, identifying the obstacles facing the profession and young lawyers in the profession. Then we held a brainstorming session identifying methods or projects by which we could address these issues. The Committee developed a quality of life survey designed to assess the challenges and obstacles young lawyers face when establishing a legal practice, while also balancing life and family needs. In response to the needs identified at the planning retreat and in the survey, the Minority Legal Symposium was conceived.

B. Determination of Project Goals and Design

1. Decisions to be made

a. Options - Project Goals

The committee's goal was to assist minority law students in their transition from law student to practicing attorney and women attorneys in addressing some of the challenges and biases that still exist within the profession. Moreover, the committee wanted to be able to provide a setting wherein the attendees would feel comfortable expressing their concerns and that the panelists would feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

The committee also set as a goal to provide a network or mentoring opportunity, introducing more seasoned attorneys with students and younger attorneys who work in similar fields and come from similar backgrounds, so that they provide mutual support for one another.

While the focus of the committee is geared toward minorities and women, the committee recognizes that these are issues that affect the legal profession as a whole and hopes that these symposiums generate cross-gender and racial interest, that will result in a better understanding for the entire profession.

b. Options - Project Design

Format: After the initial symposium, the committee provided evaluation forms to the participants and the overall response was that the attendees wished they had more time to discuss the issues with the panelists in a more intimate setting. Based on that feedback, we redesigned the symposium from a panel discussion to the current form of a workshop format. The attendees are divided into groups and the speakers are assigned to each topic. Then the groups rotate through each topic discussion providing an opportunity for more open and honest dialogue and more interaction between the groups. We have found that this approach enhances the discourse in the groups and allows for more intense and focused discussions of the issues at hand.

The symposiums have traditionally been held on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., allowing for students at other schools, and busy working professionals to attend. The symposium typically covers four topics and holds four 45-50 minute sessions on each topic, with breaks provided after the first two sessions and lunch after the last two sessions.

The panel group for each topic typically consists of three to four speakers. Each speaker is allowed 3-5 minutes to talk and the discussion is opened up for questions and more focused discourse. We have used a moderator during these discussions and have found that one is really not necessary. If conversation becomes stymied (which isn't often) a committee member could be placed in the group to reignite the discussion. The attendees have stated that the most helpful portion of the symposium is to have access to the panelists and to hear their experiences and to have an opportunity to ask them information in an intimate setting.

Selection of Panelists: Aside from advertising, this is the most significant part of this project. An overly verbose panelist can control a panel and stifle the interaction amongst the group. It is also a challenge to find panelists who are willing to talk openly about their experiences in the legal profession, especially if you chose to videotape or tape record the symposium. The panelists should exhibit the diversity within the profession. It has been challenging for our committee to expand the diversity of the panelists beyond African-Americans and women, mainly due to the limited number of Hispanic and Asian attorneys in the community. The committee has been able to include some Hispanic and Asian speakers though in most of our panels. An increase in the diversity of panelists promotes the increase in

the diversity of the attendees and the broadening of views and issues addressed in the panel discussions.

With the above goals and concerns in mind, committee members pledged to recruit one to two panelists for each discussion topic, traditionally resulting in 8-15 panelists for each symposium.

Choice of Date: This is not as big a concern with the young lawyers symposium, but it is essential to the student symposium. The committee has placed an emphasis on ensuring that the resources and information provided at each symposium are available to as many attendees as possible. Therefore, we have held the symposiums at a different law school each time and we strive to schedule it at times when other schools don't have conflicts (e.g. mid-term exams or projects, homecoming, or spring break).

The committee has found that it's easier to find a date that works for the intended facility and then to have committee members select speakers who are available on this date. This approach has been extremely successful.

Audience: The intended audience for the student symposium is third year law students, but the committee advertises to the entire law school population at each law school. The committee has also received feedback from several first year and second year law school students who stated that it was helpful to have this information before earlier in their law school career and many third year law students who stated they wished they had access to this information earlier in their law school career.

The intended audience for the young lawyers symposium are lawyers who have been practicing 0-4 years. The committee advertises at local professional bar meetings and in hopes to have more seasoned attorneys attend the symposium to enhance the discussions and exchange of ideas at the symposium. Attendees have typically consisted of young lawyers.

Choice of Facility: For each student symposium, we choose a local law school to serve as the venue. This ensures that students from all over the state are reached and have access to the information provided at each symposium.

The venue for the young lawyers symposium has also been held at local law schools, as well as the North Carolina Bar Center. The most important aspect of the venue for the young lawyers symposium is finding a facility that is well known and near in proximity to the law school body targeted.

The final aspect to consider when choosing the facility is the availability of rooms for the breakout sessions and space to serve and have breakfast and lunch. You will also want a facility that has audio-visual capability in case one of your speakers has that need. The local affiliate's staff could be a great resource in facilitating contacts with the area law schools and bar associations.

Room Layout: The room layout will typically depend on the needs of the speakers and the number of attendees. When dealing with classrooms at a law school, what typically works best is a small seminar room, that holds no more than 25 people. This will provide a more intimate setting, promoting more open discussion and greater interaction within the group. Typically, the panelists sit in the front of the room and the attendees sit in the audience, but another possible set-up could be a circle format where everyone either sits around a table or in a hollow circle. What's most important is that everyone can be heard and seen.

2. Decision-making process

The committee is co-chaired by a husband and wife team, and has the assistance of the Executive Committee of the NCBA Young Lawyers Division and the NCBA staff. Most of the preliminary decisions are made by the committee chairs with input from the committee members, then the committee chairs relay the suggestions to the Executive Committee and the NCBA staff liaison and they provide their input regarding the proper contact persons and the feasibility of the committee's ideas.

3. Considerations in project planning

a. Community Resources

This project would not be possible without the constant support and assistance of the local law schools and their staff, the North Carolina Bar Association and their wonderful staff and our members working through their various professional bar associations. The law schools and the NCBA provide invaluable assistance that is discussed more completely in 3. b., supra., but all of these resources have provided great word-of-mouth advertising and have encouraged minority and women legal organizations to announce the upcoming symposiums at their meetings. These organizations have also been a resource for obtaining panelists.

b. Personnel

The committee worked together with the staff and career counseling department for the student symposiums we've conducted, and with the North Carolina Bar Association Staff. The staff at the NCBA is invaluable and provides assistance with advertising, by placing "save the date" letters, agendas, registration forms, and contact information on the NCBA's website, and facilitating targeted advertising through the organization's various list-servs. They also assist with registration of attendees, selection of caterers, and for the young lawyer symposiums, they have assisted with set-up and staffing the day of the symposium. Finally, the NCBA staff liaison also coordinates accounts receivable and payable.

c. Revenue availability/fund raising

The committee was not provided a budget for this project. We applied and were awarded a grant in the amount of \$1,500 from the North Carolina Bar Association's Endowment Foundation to hold both symposiums. From that grant, we were able to meet all of our advertisement needs and goals, as well provide breakfast and lunch for the attendees and panelists free of charge. Advertisement expenses were approximately \$200.00, while food expenses were approximately \$800.00. For the student symposium, we served bagels and cream cheese with juice and coffee for breakfast and box lunches containing sandwiches and salads. For the young lawyer's symposium, we were able to provide a breakfast buffet and a hot lunch buffet, consisting of a choice of salads, entrees and desserts.

We will be able to use the excess from our budget for our future symposiums this fall and next spring.

d. Other...Include equipment/physical needs

Depending on the size of the audience and the room set-up, microphones may be needed. Other equipment needs may be driven by your speakers and the manner in which they decide to make their presentations. Otherwise, there are no required visual aids or auditory needs for this project.

III. Implementation...How to replicate your project

A. Timetable

Even though we have two symposiums, which serve two different audiences, we still follow the same timetable for both as they consist of the same format. It takes three to four months to plan this project.

Three to Four Months Prior to the Symposium

1. Organize committee members (determine each committee member's time commitment and availability for certain tasks).
2. Select a date and time for the symposium (check for conflicts with other local bar events or school events) Weekdays or evening may work better depending on your community and audience.
3. Secure funding for symposium.
4. Identify Topics for symposium (developing a survey may be helpful in this area).
5. Conduct any necessary research for topics.
6. Prepare Agenda for symposium.
7. Recruit and confirm speakers for symposium.
8. Select and confirm venue and coordinate with venue representative.
9. Identify methods of advertising.
10. Identify possible co-sponsors (e.g. Other minority or professionalism committees within your affiliate).

Two Months Prior to the Symposium

1. Send speakers any needed research and/or directions to venue.
2. Identify any special needs your speakers may have (e.g. visual aids).
3. Prepare and place "Save the Date" letters on affiliate websites.
4. Place "Save the Date" letter in affiliate publications.
5. Contact and confirm caterer.
6. Contact area law schools.
7. Contact minority bar sections.
8. Contact minority bar associations.

One Month to two weeks Prior to the Symposium

1. Confirm menu and number of attendees.
2. Secure any tables, chairs, microphones or other audiovisual needs speakers may have.
3. Continue advertising through targeted e-mails and word-of-mouth.

Post Symposium Debriefing

1. Review Evaluation forms and assess the need for changes or ideas for new topics for future symposiums.
2. Send thank you letters to speakers (gifts or certificates as well if it's in your budget).
3. Send articles to your local affiliate publications highlighting the symposium and if possible, advertising the venue and time for the next symposium.

B. Recruitment and Training of Volunteers/Personnel

The project does include recruiting volunteers to participate as panelists for the workshops. This was not an obstacle in planning the legal symposium for students, for it involved non-controversial topics such as financial planning and the tools and resources needed to establish your own practice. The committee discovered, however, that when planning the symposium for young practitioners, participants were somewhat hesitant to volunteer. Some volunteers were reluctant to discuss topics as why they didn't have more minorities in their firms or why they hadn't been successful in retaining more minorities. Ensure volunteers that this will be a productive discourse about the issues involved in recruitment and retention of minorities in a forum where both the employer's interest and the young practitioner's interest can be mutually discussed.

C. Publicity

Since the focus of this project was the needs of minorities in the legal profession, we took advantage of using the resources and informal word of mouth advertising through our Bar Association's Hispanic Lawyer's Committee, through local minority bar associations, and student minority groups at local law schools. Other forms of advertising included local bar publications and newsletters, and the NCBAR webpage.

We experienced the most success, however, using a mass e-mail to the minority and women attorneys registered on the Young Lawyers Division list-serv and through the local law schools' list-serv. Our YLD Chair sent the e-mail to the attorneys registered on the list-serv. The law school career services counselors sent e-mails to their students. Both e-mails contained the agenda, list of program participants, a registration form for the symposium, and a designated contact person for telephone registration. This continues to be the most successful method of advertising.

D. Day-to-Day Operations

This project has evolved into a semi-annual event, and during the months preceding the symposium we follow the timetable outlined above. There are no per se day-to-day operations.

IV. Evaluation and Impact

The Minority Legal Symposiums provide a forum for minorities and women in the legal profession to address issues that are unique to them in a safe environment that promotes open discourse across racial and gender barriers. The symposium also illustrates that while great strides have been made to "diversify" the legal profession, biases still exist for minority and women attorneys and these barriers must be overcome.

After our first symposium, we distributed an evaluation form seeking interest in this project and topics and suggestions for additional symposiums. A copy of the evaluation form is attached hereto as Exhibit A. We have used the feedback we've received from the those formal evaluations to modify and expand the format of our symposium in an effort to broaden our audience and impact of this project.

Holding the symposiums at different venues has enabled us to reach people throughout North Carolina, and has provided opportunities for partnership with other minority student and professional organizations. The symposium also provides fabulous networking opportunities for minority and women practitioners of the North Carolina Bar.

V. Bibliography/Other Resources

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