



ILLINOIS STATE  
BAR ASSOCIATION

# THE CHALLENGE

*The newsletter of the ISBA's Standing Committee on Minority and Women Participation*

## • FINAL PRINTED ISSUE •

This newsletter will be sent exclusively via e-mail from now on.

See page 8 of this newsletter to learn how you can be sure you don't miss any future issues!

## Letter from the Chair: A call to action

By Andy Fox

Tapping away in a laptop into the wee hours of the night, clicking through sites trying to find that one bit of information that will make you shine at work, that will wrap up the perfect research assignment, that will get the naysayers and critics to stop redlining your work and forwarding your e-mails is a like a frenzied rush to the finish line at the Chicago or Boston Marathon. There is so much more to the profession, although the little victories in life and the law are sweet justice. Everybody needs a win every now and again. The Standing Committee on Minority and Women Participation and President Joe Bisceglia's Task Force on Diversity are calling you to action.

For example, I have been fortunate enough to help out with the Mock Trial Program sponsored by the Chicago Bar Association, Chief Judge Timothy Evans and a premier law firm. The joy

of teaching our future lawyers, whose eyes light up when you demonstrate how to mark an exhibit for identification, approach an invisible opposing counsel table and ask permission of the pretend judge to approach a high school student in a mock trial class cannot be expressed in words. They all suddenly wake up and giggle nervously when you shout out, "Objection, foundation!" and then throw in a bellowed baritone drone, "Sustained." You have to live it. And so do the future lawyers.

My letter this month is a call to action. From the hallowed oak-lined halls or your small cubicle in a ho hum office building, you must extricate yourself and do something for the next generation of lawyers. Think of one simple thing, maybe two, you can do to promote a more diverse legal profession. Have you shared your career path with anyone lately? Have you offered to be on a discussion panel? Have you gone online and reached out to a local law school in search of some way you can give back to the profession that you love (or loath) so much? For me those are great ideas, but it means so much more. We do a lot of planning and talking as lawyers, but why reflect and plan from a high level when you can get out there in your community and make a difference? I have been around some of the most amazingly driven and exciting people (who just happen to be lawyers, too) in



Andy Fox

the last year and I can't imagine what we can't do together. But what can you do?

There are grade schools and high schools all over this incredible state starved for role models. Have you ever thought of just calling up your alma mater, whether it be a grade school, high school or university and offered to volunteer for something, anything? I did and they asked me to help out with the mock trial team. They brought me in to talk about the Dream Act and the prospects of seeing real immigration reform. They asked me to come out and be "Principal for a Day," and the next thing you know I am walking along chatting with Maggie Daley about the incredible murals in the school. Lift your head from the books, from the courthouses, from the long commutes, from the doldrums and hunger pangs of working long hours, and breathe, even if just for one day. Have you thought about attending one of the many seminars or CLEs that our committee has put on? We are always looking for new and dynamic speakers.

Maybe none of that meets the needs of your busy schedule. There are some other equally exciting opportunities for those who need a nexus between their efforts and the bottom line. Maybe that means that this year you offer to do judicial evaluations, or sit on a committee in your law firm, or take a leadership role at work or in the legal community that brings more clients to the door. Maybe you crave some other legal challenge and are waiting at the precipice for a nudge: well, here it is. Go for it and we will be there to celebrate your success with you.

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# Last chance to complete diversity survey

By Sonni Choi Williams

A “call to action” has been issued to all Illinois attorneys to participate in the first statewide survey designed to gauge the level of diversity in the state. The survey closes March 25, 2008, so please respond now if you have not already done so.

ISBA President Joseph G. Bisceglia established the ISBA Task Force on Diversity in September 2007 with a mission to implement the Diversity Pipeline Project recommendations and promote greater diversity in the legal

community and bar association.

To that end, the Task Force has developed a statewide diversity survey—the first of its kind to collect quantitative and qualitative data. It has a twofold purpose:

- To create baseline data regarding attorney demographic information on a county-by-county basis.
- To ascertain the satisfaction of Illinois attorneys in their law practices and work environments, and on diversity-related issues within the

profession.

In order to obtain meaningful data, please participate, and promote and encourage all Illinois attorneys and judges to complete the survey on the ISBA home page at <<http://www.isba.org>>. The survey takes about five minutes to complete. The results will provide valuable information on who we are as lawyers, and how we feel about our law practices and our role in the larger legal community in Illinois.

## Diverse experiences: Covering my hair, not my mind: A Muslim woman’s perspective

By Amina Saeed

*This is the first in a series of articles written by practitioners about the challenges faced by minority and women attorneys in the profession and strategies to meet those challenges. If you are interested in contributing an article to this series, please contact The Challenge’s newsletter editor, Tracy Prosser, at [tracy\\_prosser@ilsd.uscourts.gov](mailto:tracy_prosser@ilsd.uscourts.gov).*

I used to resent being asked if I was the translator when I walked into the courtroom. The first few court appearances were the hardest. As I introduced myself at the bench, I could feel the heat of the attorneys’ eyes on me as they paused in their work to look up and wonder, “She’s an attorney.” I felt incredible pressure to get it right. I quickly learned that I had to work much harder than some of my colleagues to gain acceptance or be considered their equal.

It was 1996-97 and I was a newly licensed attorney in Chicago. I am an American Muslim woman of South Asian descent. I am also part of a much smaller minority group: American

Muslim women attorneys who cover their hair as a religious duty (commonly referred to by the Arabic term, hijab, a concept that incorporates modesty). When I graduated in 1996, I knew of no Muslim women attorneys who observed hijab. Thus, I had no role models who could completely relate with my experiences.

Over time, I have realized that it is just as much of a learning process for those around me to accept me as an attorney as it is for me to be a pioneer of sorts. Time and again, as I overcame the obstacles, I found that I gained acceptance, respect and friendship.

I have heard some unnerving stories of judges ordering Muslim women (non-attorneys) to remove their scarves in the courtroom. Thankfully, the judges and justices I have appeared before have always been courteous. The same has been true, for the most part, of my colleagues over the years. In my first position out of law school, I was amazed that some of my colleagues reacted more strongly than I did if an inappropriate comment was directed at

me or if I was treated differently. I just accepted that it would take people longer to feel comfortable around me since I looked different than them. Yet the support of my colleagues was encouraging and comforting for me.

One of the many supportive people I have met is a judge who called me to discuss my future career goals. At first, it was a nerve-wracking moment when he called me into his chambers. I quickly ran a mental check over the day’s proceedings to figure out what I had said or done wrong. As it turned out, he wanted to tell me that he was pleased with my work and encourage me to set high goals for myself. It was such a wonderful surprise! Moments like these have, over the years, helped to convince me that I belong, that I have a place in this profession, that I can be accepted and treated as an equal.

But I have had a few disheartening experiences as well. Once I was covering a status call for a male colleague and did not know the opposing counsel. The attorney offered no apology for a very late arrival and was rude and dis-

missive. When I told her I was there for her case, she said, "What are you doing here? Go sit down!" She was equally dismissive at the bench. I remained calm and courteous but left thinking that she was in dire need of cultural diversity training. The incident was all the more troubling because the attorney was a woman. We have all heard stories about women attorneys being treated like secretaries until their male counterparts learn that the woman is really opposing counsel. But for a woman to treat another woman that way was all the more disturbing. She appeared to have a very difficult time accepting that a practicing Muslim woman could belong in a courtroom as a legal practitioner.

Such incidents, however, have been the exception for me. I no longer resent being asked if I am the translator in the courtroom. I simply accept it as a personal challenge and move ahead. These incidents motivate me to go the extra mile and be as prepared as possible. I

have learned that if I work hard, I can earn the respect of other attorneys and judges.

Hard work and proving your worth are part of the American way. No minority group has been exempted from this rite of passage. Those of us who are part of more than one minority group simply have a few extra hurdles to overcome. Even with extra hurdles, however, my experience is unworthy of comparison to the historic suffering of African American attorneys. Who am I to complain when African Americans know more about mistreatment than any other American group?

The extra hurdles help make me a better person and a better lawyer so I choose to consider them blessings rather than impediments. I cover my hair, not my mind. And as long as I keep my mind open to the world, work hard and adhere to the golden rule, there is hope that I and other Muslim women who cover their hair will be welcomed with familiarity as equal Americans.

## Who me? A law professor? – Southern Illinois University School of Law sponsors workshop for lawyers interested in law teaching

In an effort to bring more diversity to the legal academy, faculty from the Southern Illinois University School of Law presented a workshop during the Illinois State Bar Association's December 2007 midyear meeting on how practicing lawyers can transition into law teaching jobs.

Dean Peter Alexander said the workshop was developed as a recruitment tool for law schools nationwide and for the SIU School of Law in particular.

"This workshop enables us to talk about our school's public interest mission with individuals who may not know much about our institution," he said. "It also serves as an important public service insofar as we provide valuable information to persons from historically underrepresented populations who might not otherwise know how to apply for a law teaching posi-

tion. The workshop and all of the efforts of the SIU School of Law will, we hope, result in more diversity in law school classrooms across the country."

During the workshop, Professor Alice Noble-Allgire shared some of the reasons that she found law teaching to be an intellectually stimulating and rewarding career.

"The pay may not be as enticing as that offered by some of the large law firms, but what I find most attractive about this job is the opportunity to make a difference – in so many ways," Noble-Allgire said. "First and foremost, you can make a difference through your teaching. For me, there is nothing more rewarding than to see the moment when the 'lightbulb goes on' for a student—when the students 'get' what you're trying to teach them."

She said it is also rewarding to watch

## The Challenge

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students develop from young adults fresh out of college into confident and polished professionals. "There's a great sense of pride when you watch them mature over a period of three years and know that you've played a role in their development," she said.

Noble-Allgire said that law professors can also make a difference through their research and scholarship. "Writing law review articles and books gives you the opportunity to share your ideas and perspectives on legal issues," she said. "There's a great sense of accomplishment when you see your work cited in a court case or someone else's scholarship and know that you are contributing to the development of the law."

Law professors also have the opportunity to make a difference through the third major component of their jobs: service. Noble-Allgire told the group that she has had the opportunity to encourage diversity in the legal profession through her work on the Illinois State Bar Association's Standing Committee on Minority and Women Participation. She has also worked with the American Bar Association's Probate & Property magazine, the American Law Institute and the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws.

"I find that each part of my job reinforces the others," Noble-Allgire said. "My scholarship and service make me a better teacher, my teaching and service provide me with ideas for scholarship, and my teaching and scholarship open doors and give me credibility in my service."

Former Associate Dean Wenona Whitfield told the audience there are two ways to apply for law teaching jobs. One method is to submit an application directly to individual law schools in response to job openings advertised by the school, much the same as any job application process. This method allows applicants to target schools where they most want to teach and address the faculty hiring committee with a personalized resume, cover letter, and other supporting documentation the applicant wants to submit.

The second method is to use the Faculty Appointments Register sponsored by the Association of American Law Schools. This process allows the applicant to reach AALS member schools across the country by submitting a single application via the standardized form provided on the AALS Web site, <[http://www.aals.org/service\\_recruitment.php](http://www.aals.org/service_recruitment.php)>.

Dean Whitfield said that after reviewing the Faculty Appointments Register and direct applications, hiring committees will conduct screening interviews. Although some interviews are conducted by telephone or at the law school itself, most screening interviews take place at the AALS's Faculty Recruitment Conference, also known colloquially as the "meet market." The conference, held in late fall, offers an opportunity for all law school hiring committees to interview applicants in one location over the same two-day period, thereby maximizing the number of applicants that each law school can interview. Applicants also benefit from the ability to schedule interviews with a number of law schools in a short period of time in one location.

Based upon these screening interviews, Dean Whitfield said, law schools invite a handful of candidates back to campus for more interviews with faculty, students, and administrators. During the campus interviews, candidates are typically asked to give a presentation—also known as a "job talk"—on a legal topic. This presentation gives the law school an opportunity to gauge candidates' scholarly potential by engaging them in an intellectual discussion of their topic. It also permits the faculty to observe the candidate's speaking skills, which provides some evidence of how the candidate might perform in the classroom. The interview process typically culminates with job offers issued to the top candidates in December or January for positions to begin the following August.

Although all law schools are looking for candidates who will perform well at teaching, scholarship, and service, schools place varying emphasis on applicants' credentials and experience. Professor Mark Schultz told the audience that many resources (blogs, law review articles, former professors) will emphasize the credentials necessary to get an entry level job at a highly-ranked school, thereby overlooking the hiring criteria of the vast majority of law schools.

Schultz said the standard advice "has an ideal candidate in mind": someone with a J.D. from one of a few top schools and perhaps a Ph.D. in another field, as well as a prestigious judicial clerkship (ideally from the Supreme Court, but if not that, then a prestigious federal appellate clerkship), publication of several law review articles after law

school (demonstrating a track record of scholarship), and just a few years of practice experience at an elite law firm.

"In reality, this advice is misguided for most schools," Schultz said. "Many schools are focused on practical preparation. Although almost all schools value scholarship more than ever, they also continue to value practical experience because it is helpful in both the classroom and in your scholarship. You can get a terrific teaching job even if you do not fit the profile of the ideal candidate. The process is competitive, so you do need something to distinguish yourself from others. But you need not meet the narrow criteria often stated by those giving advice to people who aspire to begin their careers at top 20 schools."

Schultz said significant practice experience makes candidates better teachers. "Understanding what really matters in practice helps you make more relevant choices in designing a class," he said. "It helps you to understand the material better. Talking about your experience makes the material more interesting and compelling to students. It helps provide context. It helps in creating in-class problems, exam questions, and other materials."

Practical experience also provides a solid foundation for scholarship. "It gives you perspective as to what really matters," he said. "Your experience may contradict conventional wisdom among academics, and such contradictions are often the seeds of good articles, as are intriguing questions from practice."

Having made the transition to law teaching fairly recently from an intellectual property practice at Baker & McKenzie in Chicago, Schultz offered some advice on how to prepare for an academic job search while in practice.

"Prepare to become a scholar," he said. "Read the literature in your chosen field. Ask former professors or other scholars what to read. Subscribe to e-mail alerts from [ssrn.com](http://ssrn.com) and [bepress.com](http://bepress.com) to find new, interesting papers. You should review the legal academic literature much like a new Ph.D. student does to prepare for writing a thesis. Prepare to enter and contribute to the current scholarly conversation in your field. You must be able to discuss the academic literature intelligently in job interviews."

Schultz said that immersion into the literature will help a candidate to prepare a written research agenda. "Formulate a few ideas for future

research," he said. "Prepare a document summarizing them – perhaps five or six pages. Your research agenda will show that you are interested in scholarship and have an abundance of ideas – and you should have an abundance of ideas. These ideas should emerge from your engagement with the literature and demonstrate a coherent (even if very general) direction to one's scholarship. It's okay if your writing ultimately takes a different direction from the one your agenda describes, but you need to show ambition, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness."

The next step, Schultz said, is, "Write if you can. More and more law teaching candidates have articles written when they go on the market. If you did not at least publish a good student note, then you should write something, and it needs to be more than a two-page bar journal piece. Academic writing is difficult, and you need to give

people some reason to think you can pull it off."

Schultz acknowledged that finding time to write a law review article while in private practice can be very difficult, especially as one becomes more senior and has greater responsibilities. He found it impossible to write while working 60- to 70-hour weeks, raising a young family, managing demanding client relationships, and supervising junior attorneys. "But I did devote most of my spare time for six months to learning the literature, creating a research agenda and preparing to go on the job market," he said. He noted that he knew other successful candidates with similar preparation, but he also knew others who took time off as a fellow or visiting professor to write before going on the academic job market. "So it's not necessary to publish, but very helpful. And increasingly common," he said.

Schultz's final suggestion was for

prospective law teachers to get some advice from people who have successfully navigated the hiring process.

"The academic hiring process is unique," he said. "Preparation, practice interviewing, and knowledge of the process are essential. You should know how the AALS 'meet market' works, what questions are asked, and have good responses ready. Know what a 'job talk' is, what a good one is like, and have one ready and well-practiced. You will need mentors and advice. It's a new world; prepare for it."

Professor Suzanne Schmitz concluded the program by encouraging participants to include the Southern Illinois University School of Law among the schools to which they apply. Anyone who could not attend the workshop but is interested in receiving the handout materials may contact her via email at [sschmitz@siu.edu](mailto:sschmitz@siu.edu) or by phone at 618-453-8712.



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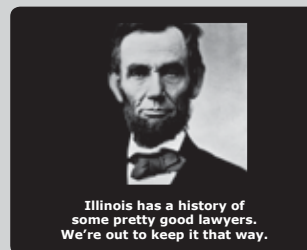
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