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FROM THE UPCOMING ISSUE

Firms look to college and high school students for next wave of lawyers

Leigh Jones / Staff reporter

March 10, 2008

In an effort to diversify their ranks, law firms are reaching beyond law schools to find and foster new talent.

With the numbers of some minority groups still relatively low at most of the nation's law firms and with competition for qualified minority candidates intense, law firms increasingly are putting their resources toward so-called pipeline projects.

The idea is to groom college students and even high schoolers to become attorneys by piquing their interest in the law at an early age.

Kirkland & Ellis, for example, has joined 12 other businesses that provide students in their senior year of high school with scholarships, college prep workshops, mentoring, summer internships and career networking. "We began to ask ourselves whether we should reach back further to increase the opportunities for diverse students to succeed in college," said Kirkland & Ellis partner Kevin Evanich. The Chicago firm has committed to providing \$55,000 in scholarships during the next five years. The High 5 initiative of Scholarship Chicago, a local nonprofit group that supports "academically ambitious, high-need students," is one of several diversity scholarship programs in which the firm participates.

At Houston-based Andrews Kurth, Elizabeth Campbell, former vice president of employment relations at Aramark Corp. in Philadelphia, recently came on board to help lead its pipeline programs. She joined the law firm as a partner and as chief diversity officer.

Andrews Kurth is working with the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues to fund a debating program in Houston high schools.

Data shows that student debaters have a higher college graduation rate, and, in many cases, go on to law school, Campbell said.

"They may end up working for us or they may be our clients," she said.

For the past two years, Sullivan & Cromwell has helped sponsor the Pipeline Crisis/Winning Strategies Initiative forum in New York, working with Goldman, Sachs & Co. and the Harvard Law School Charles Hamilton Houston Initiative for Race & Justice.

One of the events, "The Pipeline Crisis: Winning Strategies for Young Black Men," focused on the decrease in the number of young black men who are entering the educational pipeline for law firms, investment banks and other professional careers.

"You can't put people in jail and expect them to come out and work at Sullivan & Cromwell," said Bill Snipes, a Sullivan & Cromwell partner who has worked on its diversity initiatives.

Although pipeline initiatives are "well-meaning," they do not address the root of the law firm diversity problem, said Roland Dumas, director of diversity and marketing for Major, Lindsey & Africa, a legal recruiter. He points to the number women in the legal profession. They make up 50% of associates, but only 17% of partners.

"That's a demonstration that the pipeline can't cure the issue," he said.

Part of the problem, he said, is that law firms do not take advantage of a minority talent pool that is already available at nonelite schools.

The pipeline issue has gained attention amid continuing lackluster statistics of minorities in law firms. Attorneys of color equal about one in 20 attorneys at large law firms, according to *Minority Law Journal*, an affiliate of *The National Law Journal*. Although that number is an improvement from one in 30 attorneys in 2001, law firm composition is far different from the general U.S. population, in which almost one of every three citizens is a person of color.

In addition, 1992 to 2006, the number of African-Americans and Mexican-Americans enrolled in the nation's law schools accredited by the American Bar Association fell from 3,937 to 3,595, according to the Law School Admission Council.

A few scholarships at a time might not make a huge difference, said Evanich, with Kirkland & Ellis, although it is a start.

"It's definitely a collective action," he said.

For the upcoming summer, New York's Kelley Drye & Warren will participate in the New York Inner City Scholarship Fund, which will pay the salaries of four interns. Sarah Reid, head of the diversity committee at Kelley Drye, said that the goals of the new scholarship program and another in which it already participates are to expose young people to the professions.

"If they end up coming back to Kelley Drye, so much the better," Reid said.