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In Students' Eyes, Look-Alike Lawyers Don't Make the Grade  
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A bunch of law students at Stanford have started assigning letter grades to their prospective employers, which pretty much tells you who holds the power in the market for new associates. It's not easy to persuade new lawyers from the top schools to accept starting salaries of only \$160,000.

The students are handing out "diversity report cards" to the big law firms, ranking them by how many female, minority and gay lawyers they have.

"Many of the firms have atrocious, appalling records on diversity," said Michele Landis Dauber, a law professor at Stanford and the adviser for the project, called Building a Better Legal Profession. The rankings are at [www.betterlegalprofession.org](http://www.betterlegalprofession.org).

In New York, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton got the top grade, an A-minus. At Cleary, the project says, 48.8 percent of the associates are women, 8.7 percent are black, 8.3 percent are Hispanic and 4.5 percent are openly gay.

Herrick, Feinstein, by contrast, got an F. Its numbers: 37.7 percent women, 4.9 percent black, 1.6 percent Hispanics, and no openly gay people.

In Washington, no firm got an A. But seven scored in the D range, including Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher; Kelley Drye Collier Shannon; Baker Botts; and Mayer Brown.

The numbers were provided to a central clearinghouse by the firms themselves. "Our process is simple," the student group said in explaining its methodology. "Cut, paste and rank."

Firms in the top fifth received A's, in the second fifth B's, and so on. Overall grades were arrived at by averaging grades for partners and associates in five categories: women, blacks, Hispanics, Asians and gay people.

The firms with low rankings did not dispute the basic numbers, with one exception. Herrick Feinstein said it reported that it had no openly gay lawyers 'because, at the time of the filing, we did not ask for that information.' There are, the firm said in a statement, openly gay lawyers working there, 'including one on the diversity committee.'

The students have ambitious plans, including asking elite schools to restrict recruiting by firms at the bottom of their rankings. They also plan to send the rankings to the general counsels of the Fortune 500 companies with the suggestion that they be used in selecting lawyers.

'Firms that want the best students will be forced to respond to the market pressures that we're creating,' said Andrew Bruck, a law student at Stanford and a leader of the project.

Roger Clegg, the president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, a research group that supports colorblind policies, said the whole thing was pernicious.

'Diversity is all too frequently a code word,' he said, 'for preferential treatment on the basis of race, ethnicity or sex, or lower standards, or being opposed to assimilation.'

Vikram Amar, a professor at Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, added that law firms might well be violating employment discrimination laws in the process of trying to improve their rankings.

'As bad as their numbers are,' Professor Amar said of the firms, 'the relevant applicant pool of law students with top grades is more white and Asian still.'

Whatever their consequences, the numbers the students have collected offer a fascinating snapshot of the profession.

In New York, a third of the big firms had no black partners, and an overlapping third no Hispanic ones. Half the firms in Boston had no black partners, and three-quarters no Hispanic ones.

'This is 2007,' Professor Dauber said. 'If you can't find a single black or Hispanic partner, that's not an accident.'

The students also found relatively few female partners in New York, ranging from 7 percent at Fulbright & Jaworski to 23 percent at Morrison & Foerster. Those numbers are 'a bit of a canary in the coal mine,' said Deborah L. Rhode, another Stanford law professor. 'The absence of women as partners often says something about how firms deal with work-family issues.'

I asked the firms with particularly poor rankings for comments, and most of them responded, generally with quite similar statements. The issues are serious and difficult ones, they said, but they are working hard to make progress.

Some questioned the grading system. Paul C. Rosenthal, a partner at Kelley Drye, called it ''totally ridiculous,'' for instance, because the firm's Washington office received an A for the number of black associates and yet a D overall.

Others pointed to offices at their firms with better numbers, to particular partners of color, to expanded recruiting efforts and to ''affinity groups'' and ''diversity coordinators'' and a ''diversity protocol.'' None questioned the essential premise of the report, which is that numbers matter.

The report cards seem to be having an impact. Mr. Bruck said a second-year student at Stanford had recently turned down an offer from one firm ''as soon as he saw that it got an F on our diversity report card.'' Professor Dauber said the student, who is white and male, ''is the poster boy for our effort.''

But the student did not get into Stanford by being stupid enough to pick a fight with a prominent law firm at the start of his career. He would not discuss the matter.

DRAWING (DRAWING BY HARRY CAMPBELL)

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

COMPANY: CLEARY GOTTLIEB STEEN AND HAMILTON LLP; HISPANIC AND ASIAN MARKETING COMMUNICATION RESEARCH INC; [HASTINGS COLLEGE](#); HISPANIC; CLEARY GOTTLIEB STEEN AND HAMILTON; GIBSON

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