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### Organization Spotlight: Black Law Students Association

Jonathan A. Peterson

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# Organization Spotlight:

## Black Law Students Association

By *Special Contributor* Jonathan A. Peterson (3L), President of BLSA

This spring, the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) continues to serve our law school community and the greater Williamsburg community. BLSA kicked off last semester with our annual 1L Welcome BBQ. Over one hundred new law students attended. It was great to see students eager to support BLSA's work throughout the semester.

Consistent with BLSA's spirit of community service, this past semester, BLSA hosted its Thanksgiving Basket Competition with some of our most successful results. The Legal Skills firms that participated collectively donated 2,681 non-perishable food items. Just a couple of weeks later, BLSA partnered with the Christian Legal Society for our annual Angel Tree Drive. Once again, our law school community reached out to donate toys and clothes to families in the Williamsburg community. It is through the support of students and faculty that BLSA has been able to sustain our spirit of community service.

BLSA has also been very supportive in the academic development of our members and their participation in student organizations on campus. We started last semester with our annual "Survive with Sundaes" program. While eating ice cream, 2Ls and 3Ls shared their wisdom on how to succeed during the first semester of law school. We also held an outlining session, partnered with the Business Law Society and Women's Law Society, our annual job search panel discussion, and held a program for students interested in trying out for the trial team. Members of the trial team shared tips about try-outs and gave a trial team demonstration.

BLSA has also been working to reach minority college students who are interested in law school. This past semester, BLSA held its 24th annual Law Day! Law Day is our annual program for minority undergraduates. The day started with an overview of law school, a presentation by Dean Shealy on the admissions process, a

presentation on the types of financial aid available to law students, a law school class simulation, and ended with a student panel and moot court demonstration. Dean Douglas opened Law Day by giving the students a little history of the law and its role in our nation's founding, our law school, and the versatility of a legal education. Professor Marcus led the classroom demonstration, where he engaged the students by asking them challenging questions dealing with criminal law. Next, Lisa-Thomas Hicks, the Secretary of Administration for the Commonwealth of Virginia, gave the keynote address.

BLSA also spearheaded the founding of our College Student Division on the undergraduate campus. The College Student Division allows BLSA to reach students while they are in college to better enhance their decision to enter law school. So far, they have held LSAT preparation workshops and will be assigned mentors from the law school community. BLSA is extremely proud of our outreach to minority students who are interested in entering law school.

Next semester, BLSA plans to be equally active. For Worlds Aids Day, we tabled

in the lobby, providing information about HIV/Aids and safe sex practices. Picking up where we left off, this semester we plan to introduce a resolution in the Virginia Assembly to help increase funding to help fight against the spread of HIV/Aids in Virginia, especially in communities most vulnerable to the disease.

In addition, we will be helping ex-felons get their right to vote restored by holding trainings to help them navigate the complex application process. In Virginia, citizens convicted of felons must apply to have their rights restored. Last semester, our members were trained by our alumnus, Thomas Fitzpatrick, who currently works for the ACLU, on how to complete the voter restoration application. We plan to hold trainings throughout the Hampton Roads community this semester.

Finally, BLSA will continue with its other annual programs. Our 5th annual symposium, which will deal with the impact of environmental regulations on minority communities, will take place in the early part of the semester. In addition, we will hold our annual Oliver Hill Banquet during Admitted Students Weekend. BLSA has been very committed to honoring the legacy of Oliver Hill, a champion of civil rights here in Virginia. BLSA will also hold our annual staff appreciation breakfast and our annual Fashion Show during Admitted Students



**BLSA Officers - Back: Candace Headen, Jalyce Mangum, Gabriel Walker, Kevin Barrett, T. Briscoe, Eliza Epps, Eric Charity, Danielle Jarvis; Middle: Difie Osborne, Diana Cooper, Jonathan Peterson, Alexandria Poole, Jennifer Dilworth; Front: Ashley Wright; Not Pictured: Ashley Heilprin**

Weekend. The Fashion Show has become one of the main events during Admitted Students Weekend. Last year, proceeds from the Fashion Show benefited Williamsburg's Avalon Women's Shelter.

BLSA also encourages our members to have an active social life here at the law school. We held a pre-PSF Halloween costume party. We also sponsored a Game Night at Sterling Manor Club House. This semester, our members will be touring the White House on Friday, March 13. We work hard, but we also believe in having an active social life.

I would like to thank all of our members who have helped to make this past semester a success with a special shout out to the members of the board, faculty, and staff. I appreciate your dedication to BLSA, and I look forward to an equally active Spring Semester!

Jonathan A. Peterson  
BLSA President



Christmas Tree in Seattle, Washington