

You Say Diversity, I Say Inclusion: How Did the Whole Thing Start?

By Cheryl L. Davis



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EASL's Diversity Committee is still relatively young in terms of EASL's lifespan, having been started in 2011—back when we used phrases like “diverse new lawyers” and before the days of “Inclusion Riders.” Times and terminology have certainly changed, but the need remains the same.

Over the course of that first year, we:

- Hosted joint CLE programs with the Entertainment and Sports Law Committee of the Metropolitan Black Bar Association (MBBA), “From Pitch to Pilot,” and the Black Entertainment and Sports Lawyers Association (BESLA), “From Prospect to Pro—A Legal Primer on Recruitment of Professional Athletes including Foreign Players”;
- worked with the Producers Guild of America—East, Veterans Initiative by providing them with speakers for a joint event; and
- received a NYSBA Section Diversity Challenge Team Award in 2012.

Over the past seven years, we have continued to host joint events with other bar associations with an eye toward not only diversifying EASL's membership, but to introducing potential new speakers to our members; as we know, diversity in presenters is also a desirable goal. One of the objectives of the Diversity Committee is creating environments so that attorneys and law students from diverse backgrounds feel welcome as panelists, EASL event attendees and members, and ultimately, as members of our shared industry. In furtherance of that goal, we have regularly had student liaisons, and are very proud to have helped these students achieve some of their career goals in the entertainment industry.

Other programming highlights include: “Rights, Camera, Action! Obtaining Underlying Rights for Film

and Television,” with the co-sponsorship of MBBA and the support of Cardozo's Black Law Students Association and South Asian Law Student Association, and “Luminaries Lighting the Path for Creative Professionals—the MGMT Edition.” The latter was an interactive networking experience (again jointly presented with MBBA), where a panel of seasoned music executives and artist managers shared their professional experiences representing A-list musicians and entertainers in the business. The venue was SRO, and the informal setting at Black Wax Creative Space was very popular with attendees. This was the first of our “unCLEs”—so named because the goal is for audience members to share and learn from others' experiences, rather than get CLE credit.

Lest you think the Diversity Committee does not take on contemporary legal issues, in response to the Blurred Lines decision, on March 23, 2016, we presented “Protecting Your Share, Respecting What's Fair Sampling and Co-Authorship in Pop, Urban and Dance Music—Relevant Legal Precedent and Practical Legal Tips,” followed by “Is This the Real Life? Virtual and Augmented Reality,” which was co-sponsored by MBBA, the Asian American Bar Association of New York, and the Cardozo Entertainment Law Society. The Diversity Committee also presented a CLE panel about “Low Budget Agreements & Diversity Initiatives,” in which counsel from the Writers Guild of America, SAG/AFTRA, the DGA, and an experienced producer in the low-budget film world discussed the types of contracts the unions have for lower budget projects, as well as each union's effort to diversify its respective organization.

We look forward to working with other bar associations and student groups in the future, with a goal of making our industry ever more inclusive in the legal offices as well as in front of the cameras, on the stage, and the playing field. We maintain our working relationships with other similar bar groups, and cross-market and attend each other's' functions. We also have regular in-person meetings in which we work on our programming, use the opportunity to learn more about each other's practices and ambitions, and do our own networking. We are open to new Committee members who want to share and work with us.