
Balancing the Classroom and the Boardroom

**Tips for Succeeding as a Student
while Serving as a National Officer**

**Kiki Griffith, National Internal Chief of Staff
2016-2017**

Introduction



To the Members of NBLSA,

I hope this message finds you well. It is an honor to serve the National Black Law Students Association as a national executive officer. However, it is important to remember the title we hold before we pursue an executive position. That is, the title of *student*. We are students before anything else. As we prepare to serve one of the largest student-run organizations in the country, we should not lose sight of the reason why we are in NBLSA in the first place. Nothing should compromise our commitment to being the best students we can be. That said, it is possible to succeed in the classroom and the boardroom at the same time. The key is prioritization.

The purpose of this guide is to help prospective and current national executive officers manage the rigors of law school while fulfilling their responsibilities as NBLSA board members. Using survey data from NBLSA alumni and advisory board members, this guide helps students identify what they should prioritize as a 1L, 2L, and 3L. It also advises students as to when school-related matters should take precedence over NBLSA responsibilities. NBLSA wants nothing more than to see all of its members succeed. This guide is meant to reinforce NBLSA's commitment to "increase the number of culturally responsible Black and minority attorneys who excel academically, succeed professionally, and positively impact the community."

Sincerely,
Kiki Griffith
National Internal Chief of Staff, 2016-2017

1L National Officers

PRIORITIZE SCHOOL WORK

As a 1L, grades are most important. School assignments should take priority over NBLSA matters. First-year students generally hold appointed positions as specialists and are appointed at the end of the spring semester. Therefore, 1L students should focus on their finals before they fully immerse themselves in their national executive board role.

CHECK-IN REGULARLY WITH YOUR LEAD OFFICER

All positions that are most suitable for first year students fall under a lead officer. For example, the Judicial Advocacy Specialist falls under the National Attorney General and the Communications Specialist falls under the National Director of Communications. It is important for first-year students to communicate regularly with their lead officer in order to stay updated on their assignments and learn how to accomplish them efficiently. Regularly keeping in contact with the lead officer can also help first-year students gain insight on how NBLSA operates as a non-profit organization. This knowledge is necessary to have when running for an elected position.

First-year students should keep their lead officer informed about their class schedule and school assignments. They should work with their lead officer to schedule NBLSA responsibilities around due dates for papers, midterms, and finals. Creating a calendar for NBLSA and school assignments and sharing it with the lead officer can make it easier for both individuals to organize and schedule tasks.



CONSIDER FINDING A MENTOR

1L students should find someone to mentor them as they navigate their first year of law school while holding a national executive position. Mentors can provide a unique perspective to first-year students. They have often experienced trials and errors and can save first-year students from making unnecessary mistakes. Likewise, their experiences can help first-year students learn successful ways to study for exams and prioritize their various responsibilities. Mentors can also connect first-year students with resources that they may not be aware of such as study aides, outlines, and employers.

The mentor does not have to be on the national executive board. A good mentor is anyone the student admires who has already completed their first year of law school and can give sound advice about how to manage school and extracurricular activities. Local BLSA chapters can be a good place to start when looking for a mentor. The regional and national boards are also committed to providing first-year students with resources to help make them successful. Professors can make great mentors as well.

2L National Officers

CONSIDER AN APPOINTED POSITION

Second-year law students are best situated to hold appointed managerial positions. This is because appointed managerial positions allow officers to manage specific sectors of NBLSA and gain further insight about how NBLSA operates. For example, the National Director of Alumni Affairs and Development is responsible for all matters relating to NBLSA alumni such as coordinating programs that maintain relationships between alumni and current students, organizing alumni receptions, and regularly communicating with and advising the Regional Directors of Alumni Affairs. Appointed managerial positions also entail slightly less responsibilities than elected positions. This is an important consideration since the second-year of law school can be fairly demanding.

CONSIDER TAKING THE MPRE

Second-year students should start thinking about taking the Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination (MPRE). The MPRE is required for admission to the bar of almost every jurisdiction and is offered three times a year (March, August, and November). 2L national officers may find it more feasible to take the exam in August or November as opposed to March. NBLSA convention season lasts from the middle of December to the middle of March. The national convention itself generally occurs either at the beginning or in the middle of March. Those who take the MPRE in March will likely have to study for the exam during convention season and possibly during the week of convention. Second-year students may find that they can dedicate more time to study for the MPRE in either August or November.

PRIORITIZE YOUR JOB SEARCH

As a 2L, securing a job and maintaining good grades takes precedence over NBLSA responsibilities. There are multiple avenues second-year students can take advantage of when searching for jobs. Some include participating in on-campus interviews (OCIs), sending out a resume and cover letter to multiple employers, doing mock interviews, going to events hosted by local bar associations, and networking with lawyers.

Second-year students should inform the Chair, Vice Chair, or team leader when they have to attend interviews or networking receptions so that the lead officer does not schedule or delegate duties that could conflict with these events. In the event that a student is unexpectedly invited to do a follow-up interview at a firm, the student should immediately inform their lead officer and, after receiving permission, put their NBLSA responsibilities on standby until after the interview. If possible, second-year students should give their lead officer a calendar that lists the networking receptions and interviews the student plans on participating in throughout the year.

ADVICE FROM A NATIONAL OFFICER

“Grade wise I had the best semester in law school [the fall of my 2L year]. The semester in which I was on the NBLSA Board. It has something to do with not being a 1L anymore but I believe it’s because I have more responsibilities which force me to be more efficient with my time.” – Jeremy McLymont, National Director of Social Action, 2016-2017

3L National Officers

PRIORITIZE THE MPRE

The MPRE should be a priority for all third-year students on the national board. Similar to the recommendation given to 2L board members, 3L board members should consider taking the MPRE in either August or November as opposed to March. Taking the MPRE in March would require students to study for the exam during convention season. It may be easier to focus on the exam while having no responsibilities for convention.

COMPLETE THE BAR APPLICATION

Third-year students should finalize their bar applications. Depending on the state where the bar is being taken, students may need to complete their application by the fall of 3L year. It is important to remember that things such as parking tickets, outstanding fines, and multiple prior residences can prolong the application process. Therefore, students should give their applications enough time to be fully processed in light of these or similar factors. Students should remember to check the requirements of the jurisdiction where they are taking the exam.

Third-year students should also finalize their living and transportation arrangements for the months they will be studying and the night before the exam. It is best to stay as close to the testing site as possible the night before the exam. Hotel arrangements and car rentals should be made at least three months before the test date.

MINIMIZE SCHOOL CREDITS

Third-year board members should try to take the minimum amount of credits possible, especially if they are interested in an elected position. The third year of law school is a feasible time to take minimum credits since law students typically have most of their graduation requirements completed by this time. Therefore, 3L national board members should aim to lighten their school work load so that it is easier to schedule and fulfill responsibilities as a board member.



ADVICE FROM A NATIONAL OFFICER

“My advice is not to plan your life around NBLSA. Make NBLSA work in your schedule. Set aside time where you must, obviously for calls and meetings, but take care of home first. And make friends. These are some of the most influential people you could be around, so take advantage.” – Gennelle Chatman, National Director of Pre-law, 2016-2017