

Equity & Diversity

Blakes
LAWYERS

"What diversity means on the agenda at Blakes is making every effort to be constantly attuned to two central things: the fact that within this workplace we have all of these differences represented, and that we need to consider those differences in our actions and our decisions."

Robert Granatstein,
Firm Managing Partner
Law Practice Magazine, American Bar Association, June 2008

Equity & Diversity Committee

Equity and diversity is a core value at Blakes. The committee is made up of members who are representative of the Firm's diverse workforce. Its mandate is to promote equity and diversity at Blakes through a wide range of activities and initiatives, oversee the Blakes Workplace Harassment Policy, and facilitate thought and discussion to bring about positive change.

Acknowledgements and Recognition

Blakes was named one of "Canada's Best Diversity Employers" for 2008 and 2009 by Mediagroup Canada Inc., Canada's largest publisher of employment periodicals. The only law firm on the list, Blakes is one of only 25 organizations in Canada to win this award. "Canada's Best Diversity Employers" recognizes the nation's leaders in workplace diversity and inclusiveness initiatives among several employee groups, including women, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, aboriginal Canadians, and gay and lesbian employees. The Firm's commitment to diversity is one of the reasons Mediagroup has recognized Blakes as one of "Canada's Top 100 Employers" for the past five years.

Diversity Initiatives

Some of the equity and diversity initiatives supported by Blakes in recent years include:

Mentoring and Training

Blakes partners, associates and students, as well as its professional and administrative staff, are drawn from a diverse and varied talent pool. In order to promote, foster and enhance this diversity, Blakes provides diversity training to incoming legal personnel. Blakes lawyers from a variety of backgrounds run the training sessions. The incoming professionals are advised of Blakes Workplace Harassment Policy, which is designed to ensure everyone at Blakes is treated with respect and dignity. There is also an open discussion about equity and diversity issues within the legal profession generally. We seek to approach these issues in creative and innovative ways, often having the incoming professionals consider and discuss various hypothetical situations in smaller facilitated working groups.

Women's Network

In 2008, Blakes launched the "Women's Network" for women legal professionals at the Firm. This initiative was launched to provide support, mentorship, client development and networking opportunities, and work/life resources to women students, associates and partners at Blakes in an effort to ensure their success in the practice of law. In 2009, Blakes hosted an "Evening of Design Inspiration," featuring a tour of the Junior League's Showhouse at the McLean House for its women clients. This event provided women at Blakes an opportunity to network and relationship-build with clients, in a fun and relaxed atmosphere. Blakes remains committed to supporting inclusive professional and business development initiatives and expanding opportunities for women at the Firm.

Business Leadership for Women Lawyers/The Judy Project

Blakes is a founding sponsor of the Business Leadership for Women Lawyers program, which is a partnership initiative between the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management and the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto. The three-day intensive program in which Blakes lawyers participate is designed specifically to help women lawyers build professional confidence and acquire relevant business skills. Blakes is also proud to be a founding sponsor and continuing participant of the "The Judy Project, An Enlightened Leadership Forum for Executive Women," hosted by the Rotman School of Management. This program supports women in leadership roles within Canadian businesses and organizations.

Equity & Diversity Seminars

In order to further promote constructive discussion and reinforce equity and diversity as a core Blakes value, the Firm hosts a series of seminars on these topics. The seminars are designed to help us better understand the challenges faced by diverse communities and the opportunities that are afforded by a diverse and dynamic workforce. Recent seminars include a presentation by Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce on diversity initiatives at the bank, a presentation by a prominent South African law firm on its diversity initiatives in post-apartheid South Africa and a presentation by a prominent New York law firm on its efforts to support and encourage students at a diverse inner-city high school.

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Canada is one of the world's most diverse nations, home to many different cultures, beliefs and lifestyles. At Blakes, we draw strength from that diversity to build a workforce that is rich in a wide array of perceptions and backgrounds.

Diversity Lunches

In 2007, Blakes launched its diversity lunch series. Blakes lawyers and students are treated to a diverse menu while learning about various regions of the world and Blakes international initiatives. For example, a presentation about the Firm's India initiative was accompanied by authentic Indian cuisine, and Blakes celebrated Chinese New Year with a traditional Chinese menu and a presentation on doing business in China. In 2008, Blakes hosted its first annual Blakes Multiculturalism Day to celebrate the food, culture and traditions of the various communities that comprise our Firm.

Blakes Bulletin on Equity & Diversity

Blakes Bulletin on Equity & Diversity is published periodically to provide our lawyers with valuable information regarding developments in the legal and business worlds relating to equity and diversity. Included in the bulletin are articles on what Blakes is doing to encourage a diverse and equitable workplace within our own offices. The bulletin also provides a forum to engage in constructive discussion on these issues. We are pleased to have contributions from a diverse group of students, associates and partners from across the Firm.

Diversity Calendar

Many who work at Blakes may have to take time away from the office, maintain certain dietary restrictions or engage in other important practices in order to honour, acknowledge or celebrate certain religious and cultural holidays and observances. In order to increase awareness and understanding of diversity at Blakes, the Equity & Diversity Committee publishes a description of many of these events, setting out the history behind them, as well as the traditions surrounding them.

New Pioneers Awards

Since 2002, Blakes has supported the New Pioneers Awards, sponsored by Skills for Change, an organization that provides support for new immigrants to Canada. The New Pioneers Awards celebrate the outstanding contributions made by immigrants and refugees to Canada. The Firm's financial contribution helps to further the important work of this not-for-profit organization. In 2009, Blakes sponsored the Entrepreneurship Award, which was presented to Neena and Vijay Kanwar, the principals of KMH Cardiology and Diagnostic Centres, the largest provider of nuclear cardiology services.

Student Outreach Programs

Blakes supports diverse student organizations that seek to promote inclusion in the legal profession, including the Black Law Students' Association of Canada (BLSAC), the Jewish Law Students Association of Canada, the Korean Law Students Association of Canada and Women and the Law. For example, in 2008, Blakes was proud to be a platinum sponsor of the BLSAC conference in Vancouver, where Blakes Scholar in Residence Peter Hogg delivered the keynote address during a Blakes-sponsored lunch. Blakes returned as a platinum sponsor in 2009 for the Halifax conference where Blakes Associate Shashu Clacken delivered a keynote address regarding Blakes pro bono work on behalf of women who were victims of sexual violence in Africa.

Blakes lawyers also frequently attend seminars at Canadian law schools to address issues that students from diverse backgrounds may have about practising law at a large corporate firm. For example, Blakes has participated in panel discussions at the University of Toronto on "Diversity and the Practice of Law."

Law in Action Within Schools (LAWS)/ Blakes Mentoring Program

Blakes also participates in the LAWS program – an innovative high school program that combines law-related studies with practical experiences for high school students who face barriers to achieving

their academic, career and life goals. The program's objectives include increasing students' knowledge about the law, introducing students to positive and professional role models, and providing motivating early work experiences. The mentoring program is the first of its kind in Canada. Blakes also sponsors a bursary for LAWS students who continue on to post-secondary education.

Communicating the Message

Blakes seeks to be a leader among Canadian law firms in promoting diversity in the legal profession. The Firm's efforts in this area have been featured in a number of leading publications including the *Toronto Star*, *Canadian Lawyer*, *Lexpert* magazine and *The Lexpert Law Student and Associate Recruitment Guide*. Blakes prominently displays a diversity statement on our website, which can be viewed under the About Blakes/Equity & Diversity page. In order to encourage interest from a diverse pool of potential candidates, we feel it is critical to communicate the degree of importance Blakes places on diversity. Blakes provides information on its diversity initiatives to students during recruitment periods and has advertised in local and national newspapers and periodicals in order to communicate the message to students, potential lateral hires, clients and the broader community that "Blakes Draws Strength from Diversity."

Contact Details

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