



Lawyers volunteer time with program to improve diversity

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Lawyers with a local intellectual property law firm recently made presentations to high school and college engineering students as part of a program intended to improve diversity in the legal profession.

The presentations by lawyers with Fitch, Even, Tabin & Flannery are one example of the 15 to 20 law firms, corporate law departments and bar associations that participate in the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession's pledge program.

Under the program, which started Sept. 1, 2010, these groups can pledge that 10 percent of their lawyers will help recruit young people into the legal profession.

"Having that numerical framework was very helpful for our law firm," said [Joseph E. Shipley](#), a Fitch, Even partner involved with the institute.

Earlier this month, Shipley and [Karl R. Fink](#), another Fitch Even partner, spoke to student members of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers Inc.'s chapter at Northwestern University.

"It helps them to see law as a profession for them," Shipley said. "I think most engineering students don't look at law as a career."

Fink and Shipley both received their undergraduate degrees in engineering. Fink used the analogy that engineers have a veil in front of them because they are focused on technology and typically are not educated about how the world and society works.

"I wanted to tell the students one way to lift the veil is to go to law school," Fink said.

Fitch, Even was one of the first law firms to sign up for the institute's Pledge to the Profession program, said [Sandra S. Yamate](#), the institute's chief executive officer.

"They are making a concerted and conscious effort to make sure their lawyers are interacting with young people," Yamate said of Fitch, Even. "They're trying to provide positive role models for these young people to encourage them to think of different career opportunities."

In late September, Shipley and Jonathan C. Hughley, now a Fitch, Even associate, spoke to engineering students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Fitch, Even's focus has been on diversity pipeline organizations such as the Just The Beginning Foundation, Shipley said. The foundation runs programs to interest elementary and high school students in the legal profession.

The foundation organized a late October appearance by Shipley, Hughley and [Clinton Hughes Hallman Jr.](#), the Kraft Foods chief patent counsel, at Chicago Bulls College Prep, Shipley said. Chicago Bulls College Prep is a charter high school.

Lawyers with Kraft Foods also work with Schiff, Hardin LLP lawyers, another early participant in the institute's pledge program.

Earlier this year, lawyers with Kraft Foods and Schiff, Hardin participated in the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago's Edward J. Lewis II Lawyers in the Classroom program.

The lawyers made presentations about constitutional issues to seventh- and eighth-grade students at Pulaski International School of Chicago on the city's Northwest Side, said [Thomas P. White](#), a Schiff, Hardin partner and a member of the institute's advisory board.

"We were just amazed that the students took (an interest) in the Constitution and possibly pursuing a career in the law," White said.

[Willie J. Miller Jr.](#), senior vice president and deputy corporate counsel for Kraft Foods, heads the institute's advisory committee.

"I think the benefit to working with law firms is to continue and heighten the awareness for diversity and inclusion in the (legal) profession," Miller said.