



# SPEAKING OF DIVERSITY

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## Dialogue on Diversity



*“The Defamation Experience is a no-brainer. It puts diversity and inclusion in to the law student’s world.”*

Tina M. Jernigan, Assistant Dean for Student Life  
West Virginia University College of Law  
Morgantown, WV

**Dialogue On Diversity**, a conversation with leaders in the field of diversity and inclusion, is designed to help better understand the issues they face in today’s challenging times. This month, Tina M. Jernigan talks about her background, her challenges on campus and why The Defamation Experience fit into their Mission of preparing 21st century lawyers and leaders to serve the public, government, and business — both locally and globally — while focusing on justice, ethics, professionalism, and service in a diverse, vibrant, and respectful community.

**Q: Please tell us about your background and what prepared you for your current role.**

**A:** I am currently in my third year as Assistant Dean for Student Life at the College of Law. Prior to this position, I worked in admissions at WVU Law. I have a master’s degree in Student Affairs Counseling and have worked in residence life and housing, academic advising, law school admissions, and now this! I have always had a sincere passion for diversity and inclusion. I find that learning about peoples’ differences make us stronger as a community. My master’s degree really helped me to understand student development and that partnered with my various university experiences has really helped me prepare for my current role.

**Q: What are the Law school's goals and objectives regarding diversity and inclusion programming?**

**A:** The College of Law Mission states that we are “preparing 21st century lawyers and leaders to serve the public, government, and business — both locally and globally — while focusing on justice, ethics, professionalism, and service in a diverse, vibrant, and respectful community.” Our goals and objectives regarding programming centered around diversity and inclusion begin with our Mission. Diversity only enriches the profession, and we would like our graduates to be educated to see the multiple issues and ramifications of any case, as well as to be best equipped to serve the diverse populations that they will work with throughout their careers.

**Q: What do you feel are your biggest challenges and some of your best successes in this area?**

**A:** One of the biggest challenges that we face is living in a state that is not very diverse in regard to race and ethnicity. However, living in a college town that is home to a major university really helps in that area. The University, as a whole, does a lot to bring in various multicultural and diversity-centered events. We are a small law school of approximately 300 students. Our dean is very focused on improving diversity and inclusion and has been open to programming opportunities, including bringing in The Defamation Experience in 2017. One of our more successful endeavors has been the partnership we have developed with the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity. We have developed a unique 1L mentorship program with them that has grown from 10 to 20 students in three years.

**Q: Why did you decide to bring The Defamation Experience to WVA? How would you describe the experience, and what were the biggest learning outcomes or takeaways from this experience?**

**A:** We are always looking for ways to educate our students on diversity and inclusion. From a law school perspective, The Defamation Experience is a no-brainer. It puts diversity and inclusion in to the law student's world. Law students found themselves torn between their heads and their hearts. Kimm was an excellent facilitator for the post-show discussion. She wasn't afraid to push people and ask real questions, but she was kind and thoughtful in her approach. It was a very nonthreatening way to approach serious issues in our world today.

**Q: Is class-consciousness an issue on campus? Being that West Virginia is one of the poorest states in the country, what does that mean about student's own self confidence and how do you address it?**

**A:** Roughly 1/3 of our student body identifies as a first-generation college graduation, and while that does not always equate to coming from a lower socioeconomic background, I believe that these two groups of students often have similar feelings while in law school. Many of these students may not have ever known an attorney. Many have been told that higher education isn't for them and that they should find a job like the rest of their family. Some of these students worry that the "legacy" students have an advantage over them. We try to dispel these ideas. We try to introduce these students to practicing attorneys from similar backgrounds. We have several faculty and administrators on staff who come from similar backgrounds. So, sharing their stories can really help.

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Combined with an audience deliberation and a facilitated discussion THE DEFAMATION EXPERIENCE is a unique opportunity for your community to engage in civil discourse about the most pressing social issues of our day.

Watch the trailer at [TheDefamationExperience.com](http://TheDefamationExperience.com). For more information, contact Kimm Beavers at [defamationtheplay.kimm@gmail.com](mailto:defamationtheplay.kimm@gmail.com) to start a conversation about bringing The Defamation Experience to your venue.