

West Virginia, the Average Frustrated Chump of law schools

Written by Not an Elle

Tuesday, 13 November 2012 13:17

West Virginia University College of Law issued a [press release yesterday](#) announcing a video that purports to showcase opportunities for women lawyers. The sub headline says the video is targeted at recruiting more female students for WVU's College of Law. Prospective female students are swayed by 4 minute videos of current female students, right? Let's see how that works out.

The first sentence of the article is, "The West Virginia University College of Law wants to educate more women lawyers." Which is exactly what law schools do, they educate women lawyers. Oh. Wait. Lawyers don't go to law school. Because they're already lawyers. Law schools educate law students, and bread goes in a toaster. Not toast. But who can be bothered with details like accurate word choice when they're writing such an impressive and valuable press release? Think big picture, people; stop quibbling over specifics.

The article goes on to quote the Dean, who says WVU is committed to creating opportunities for women, and she wants women who are considering a legal career to know that they can thrive at WVU. "Good law schools can help women succeed by offering an exceptional learning environment, beneficial mentoring, and valuable experiences." Hmm. Wouldn't those same things help students of either sex succeed?

The article goes on to list several female students in various leadership positions throughout the school, as if these aren't available elsewhere, or that having females in these positions is some kind of accomplishment for which they should be granted a prize. It's not. At least half the positions mentioned were elected by the students. The students chose to run and were elected by their peers. Does WVU get to take credit for them running? For their classmates voting for them? Sure, WVU could argue that they created a women friendly environment that made this all possible, and maybe there's something there. But this isn't 1895. These students aren't Agnes Westbrook Morrison, the school's first female grad. Women are no longer a significant minority in law schools: ABA data states that women make up about 47% of law students/law graduates. Although at WVU the story is different, [only 36% of the class are women](#). The closest ranked school in the area, Louisville, is 44% women.

The video isn't much better. One student says she never feels overshadowed by her male colleagues. Another says she doesn't see men or women, she just sees law students. A faculty member says WVU wants to show women they can be excellent. And that's where the gender specific message ends. The rest of the content in the video can be applied to students of both sexes. The only women's opportunity "showcased" in the video is that WVU is willing to take the

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time and money to create videos like this.

Last month the ABA felt that women in the legal profession need to be pushed into leadership positions. WVU feels that women need to be told they can be excellent. What is it about women, particularly female law students, that compels older women in the profession to believe that younger women must be told we can succeed? And further, that simply telling young women they can succeed will be sufficient? Doesn't the presence of women in law school make it fairly clear that women know of the opportunity and their avenues for success?

I'm not shitting on the advancement of women in the legal field (or any work place) or established women in the profession helping women entering the profession. I just want to see something that actually does something, something more than nice words and fluff press releases.