

# The Evolving Commitment

Supporting First Generation Professionals in  
Law Schools and Law Firms

## Introduction

# The Law School Landscape

Berkeley and USC: Case Studies

## FGP @ USC Gould School of Law

- **History of Our Program**
- **Key Components**
  - Mental Health Awareness
    - A Healthy Sense of Entitlement – The Creation of Safe Spaces
    - Stereotype Threat
    - Imposter Syndrome
    - Growth Mindset
  - Early Exposure to Law School Resources
- **USC Gould First Gen Signature Programs**
  - Welcome Reception
  - Speed Networking Mixer
  - Etiquette Dinner
  - Graduation Celebration

# USC FGP Survey Anecdotes

“FGP provides invaluable networking, academic, and financial support.”

“I felt immensely supported by FGP, especially as I prepared for my first legal/professional job the summer following 1L.”

“Professor \_\_\_ was a great resources and mentor.”

Where did you find other sources of support during law school?

- Black Law Student Association
- Latino Law Student Association
- OUTLaw
- Public Interest Law Foundation
- Legal Aid Alternative Break

# FGP @ USC Gould School of Law

- **Full integration into Law School Community**
  - FGP Hosted 1<sup>st</sup> Conversation with the Dean
  - Admissions tours and panels
  - Law School Magazine
  - Board of Councilors Sub-Committee
- **FGP Resources**
  - Suit Stipends
  - 3L Bar Stipend
- **Professional Collaborations | Opportunities & Challenges**
  - Latham’s “Ask Me Anything” panel
  - Sidley Austin’s Game Night and Informal Mentoring
    - 1L FGP Summer Grant @ Public Counsel
  - Milbank’s sponsorship of FGP Welcome Reception
  - Invitations to law firm monthly mixers

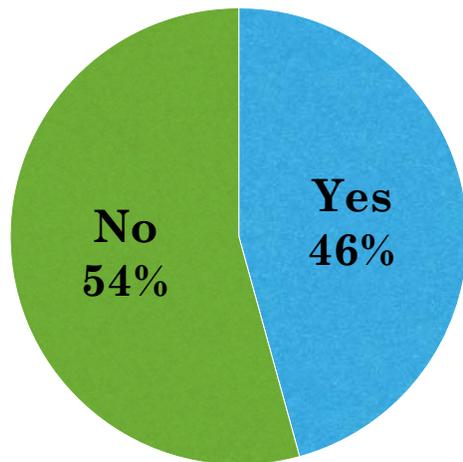
## FGP @ Berkeley Law

- History of our program
- Key components
- Now one of Berkeley Law's Signature Programs
  - Admissions Materials & Admitted Students Week
  - Berkeley Law Opportunity Scholarship

## Survey of Berkeley Law FGP Alums

- Background
- What We Were Hoping to Learn?
- Universe of Respondents

Were you the first in your family to attend college?



## Berkeley Law FGP Alumni Survey: The Law School Experience

Did your participation in Berkeley Law's FGP student group help you feel more supported and connected to community during your law school experience?

If so, how? If not, why not?

## Berkeley Law FGP Alumni Survey: The Law School Experience

If you had an FGP Alumni Mentor (through the External Mentor Program), did you benefit from this relationship?

If so, how? If not, why not?

## Berkeley Law FGP Alumni Survey: The Law School Experience

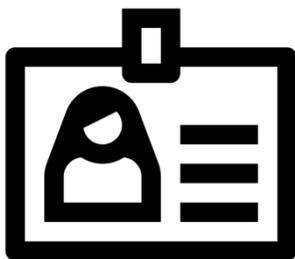
Reflecting back on your law school experience, what more could Berkeley Law have done to support you as a FGP?

# The Law Firm Landscape

A Case Study

## Lesson One

We identify as a first generation professional when we realize that this is something we can, in fact, identify as.



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“Genuinely, the first time I realized I was a First Generation Professional was when I heard the term.”

“I had a notion that I was different, but I didn’t realize that there were others like me until I learned about the group.”

“I don’t think I truly identified as a first generation professional until I went to law school and learned of the student FGP organization.”

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“There was a steep learning curve with various things, like e-mail etiquette. At my first firm, someone commented on the order in which I put the recipients in the “to” box in an email. These are things you don’t really think about.”

“You have some idea of what’s appropriate, but you may not know the specifics of how to act in unique circumstances.”

“I support a lot of people back home. I have to decide how and when I can help. Learning how to navigate that without sounding weird is challenging.”

“At home, growing up, we never ate fresh fruit. Only canned. As a senior associate, I finally gave myself permission to buy fresh fruit and vegetables.”

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## Lesson Two

We lack certain experiences that may put us as a disadvantage.



## Lesson Three

There are concrete, identifiable pieces of information that we wish we had known.



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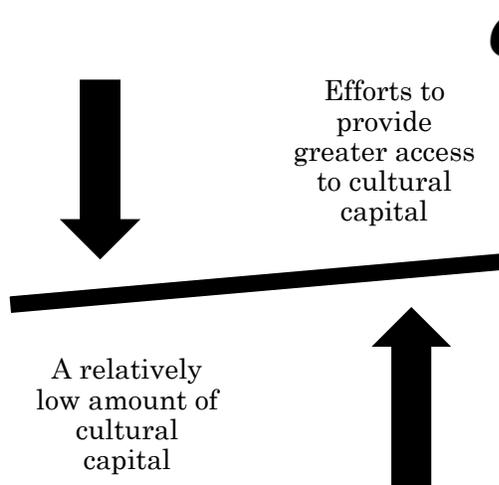
“I wish I had known how to navigate workplace social situations. All of the experiences I drew were from TV shows like ‘Law and Order.’ If I had more familiarity, I’d be less afraid and able to make more meaningful connections quicker.”

“I had no idea how to navigate my new salary and all the corresponding benefits, such as health care plans, 401K, etc. I felt embarrassed to ask.”

“I wish I had been more savvy about how to present a personal professional brand. Other folks walk in with that knowledge and it has taken me a long time to get my head around how to be perceived, and to do so authentically.”

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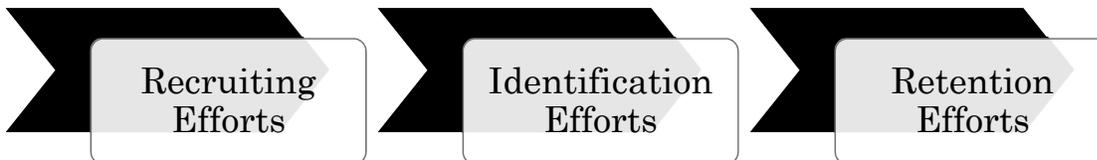
## A Recurring Theme: Cultural Capital



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Working at a firm is a lot of learning on the job, and therefore, a lot of messing up. As an FGP, your first thought when you make a mistake is that you missed something, that everyone else knows something you don't. **It confirms your belief that you're an impostor.** And that kind of negative reinforcement can spiral at times, especially when you're in over your head with work. I found it challenging to remind myself that I couldn't be expected to know certain things, that the job is designed so that you often learn on the fly, which necessarily entails trial by error. It was very hard to keep perspective and not chalk everything up to the fact that I really didn't belong in the firm world.

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“Joining the FGP Affinity Group has really helped me. I get encouragement from partners whom I might not have otherwise met.”

“Because a law firm salary is typically a lot more than what an FGP household makes, discuss ways on how to save money and invest money.”

“A partner walked me through the progression process at the firm so that I could understand my potential trajectory. This helped me understand the process so that I wasn’t closing doors on myself.”

“I don’t want to have to explain context for how I’m feeling or what the dilemma is. Other FGPs have a much easier time understanding the broader context when I’m tackling a decision in front of me.”

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## Lesson Four

Providing support makes a difference.



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Live their values. See these students as an asset, not just a checkmark or tally in your diversity columns. Have difficult conversations and trainings on things like microaggressions and implicit bias. Ask students how they can be supported and not put the burden on those students to always have to request resources or consideration. As a woman of color, that has been my biggest challenge. POCs and FGPs are constantly put in a position to be a squeaky wheel if we want to see any change. The biggest thing an employer could do for me would be to recognize that extra burden that others don't have to carry and attempt to alleviate it.

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