

## National leader Robert Grey heralds diversity efforts in IU McKinney speech

[Marilyn Odendahl](#)

April 19, 2018

As the 2018 speaker for the James P. White Lecture on Legal Education, Robert Grey, Jr., focused not on the classroom, but on what comes after and the changes that are occurring to bring more diversity to law firms and general counsel offices.

Grey is president of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, which has been a driving force behind bringing more minorities and women into the practice of law. In fact, the organization was created in 2009 by general counsels and law firm managing partners who were dissatisfied with the lack of diversity and inclusion in the legal profession.

“This is not just about diversity,” Grey told the IU McKinney audience. “This is about capturing talent in the profession and turning them into leaders.”

The legal profession is lagging other fields in diversity with only 15 percent of lawyers being minorities, compared to 33 percent of physicians and surgeons and 27 percent of architects and engineers, according to statistics provided by LCLD. In addition, while minorities comprise 32 percent of first-year law students, they are only 8 percent of law firm partners and just 6 percent of equity partners. Also, female partners, on average, are earning 44 percent less than their male counterparts.

Speaking after the lecture, Grey emphasized diversity cannot stop at just having individuals of different ethnicities, races, genders and backgrounds in the office. They also have to be given a path to participation and be included socially.

“If you become, and are made to feel like, a part of the family, you are part of the family,” he said. “But until that happens, then you are an observer of the family, and it’s nice to have your cousin, here but the brothers and sisters run the show.”

Recalling his own experience starting his career as an attorney in 1976, Grey laughed and said he was “a distant cousin.”

Prior to leading the LCLD, Grey worked most of his career in private practice, starting his own firm in 1978 and now working as senior counsel, retired, at Hunton & Williams LLP. He also taught at Virginia Commonwealth University, served on the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, was elected president of the American Bar Association in 2004 and was appointed to the Board of the Legal Services Corp. in 2002.

Part of the inspiration that led to the LCLD, Grey explained, was the attorneys of his generation asking, “What could we have had that would have helped us when we started practicing law to feel like we were part of the profession?”

The LCLD helps create a more inclusive family, Grey said. The organization brings attorneys together to talk about their similar challenges and opportunities. It also pairs the young attorneys with mentors, and encourages lawyers to take leadership positions as their careers progress and to help the new generation of attorneys who come behind them.

Grey is pleased with the progress of LCLD. He said the attorneys involved in the program, now nearing 10,000, are motivated and getting more invested in their firms and companies. Moreover, the number of firms and companies participating in the organization has surpassed 300.

“The key is not to lose momentum,” Grey said, “and the key to not losing momentum is making sure that after you do the hard work of building the talent pool, that you’ve got something for them to do, a place for them to go and a way for them to succeed.”