

Expanding the Pipeline to the Profession

by *Alana M. Glass and
John R. Nussbaumer*

A story is told of a man who found an eagle's egg. He put it with his chickens and it hatched. The eagle grew up and learned to behave like a real chicken. Like the other chickens he was only able to lift himself just a little bit off the ground. One day he looked up and saw a magnificent bird circling above the farm. The eagle wished he could fly through the air so he could see more of the world. He asked the closest hen what kind of bird that was. In response, he heard that it was the king of all birds: an eagle. "An eagle is part of the sky; as we belong to the ground, we are just chickens." So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that's what he thought he was. The moral of this story: you become what you believe you are.

On June 1, 2010, Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly shared this inspiring story in her kick-off keynote address at the American Bar Association's Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) Sophomore Summer Institute at Thomas M. Cooley Law School's Auburn Hills campus. Justice Kelly directed her remarks to the 20 undergraduate students participating in the program that is designed to expand legal education opportunities for minority, low-income and disadvantaged groups. The students traveled from 13 undergraduate institutions in six different states to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The Sophomore Summer Institute was generously sponsored by CLEO, Oakland University and Cooley. Together they committed \$83,278 in funding, which includes a \$750 stipend for each student who successfully completed the program requirements. The participants also received a total of 120 hours of academic and legal instruction over the month-long program that included critical reasoning, legal writing, contracts, professional responsibility, civil procedure and appellate advocacy.

Along with receiving legal instruction, 54 lawyers and judges from 10 bar associations including the Oakland County Bar Association participated in shaping the professional growth and development of the students by organizing career exploration panel presentations. The OCBA's Diversity Committee organized the luncheon that featured OCBA President Kurt Schnelz, OCBA board member Michael Lee, and State Bar of Michigan Vice

President Julie Fershtman. "OCBA is proud to participate in the CLEO program not only for the opportunity to educate future law students of the benefits of bar association involvement and the resources that we can provide them as they navigate their career, but more importantly, OCBA is committed to the program's objective of preparing at-risk and minority students to enter law school as this is an essential step toward achieving much-needed diversity in our profession and, in turn, our bar association," said OCBA President Jennifer Grieco.

Other participating bar associations included the Arab-American Bar Association, Association of Black Judges of Michigan, Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association, Federal Bar Association, Hispanic Bar Association of Michigan, Macomb County Bar Association, Straker Bar Association, Wolverine Bar Association, and Women Lawyers Association of Michigan. Together these organizations contributed a total of \$2,500 in funding for the program.

The program concluded on June 30 with closing remarks by former Detroit mayor and ABA Past President Dennis Archer, along with an oral argument conducted by a panel of Michigan Court of Appeals judges led by Judge Cynthia D. Stephens.

A final evaluation of each student indicated an average LSAT score increase of 6.12 points, writing diagnostic test scores increased by an average of 19.3 points, and all 20 students received passing grades on their final exams. This measurable success demonstrates the value of the program and CLEO's commitment to continuing the program next year. Additionally, Cooley-Auburn Hills will be inviting the students to monthly programs in order to continue mentoring the students toward law school. While law school is a couple of years away, it is clear that the Sophomore Summer Institute eagles have begun soaring.

Alana M. Glass is Coordinator of Career and Professional Development at Thomas M. Cooley Law School – Auburn Hills, and is chairperson of the 2010-2011 OCBA Diversity Committee.

John R. Nussbaumer is Associate Dean of Thomas M. Cooley Law School, and is the immediate past chairperson of the OCBA Diversity Committee.