

Pipeline Programs



Primary Purpose—Increase Diversity in the Legal Profession

Pipeline programs, which are designed to prepare people of color for careers in the law, are critical if we are going to be successful in increasing ethnic diversity in the legal profession. However, the process of academically and ethically preparing students for legal careers also serves another—and perhaps more important—function of providing these students with hope for a better life and helping them become responsible citizens and leaders. As discussed below, this not only benefits the nation, but also helps to keep them and those they influence out of the school-to-prison and human trafficking pipelines, both of which are disproportionately populated by young people of color.

Pipeline programs enhance primarily pre-law school education to more effectively prepare students for law school and

careers in the legal profession. They can start in elementary school and continue beyond law school. As mentioned, one goal is to increase diversity in the legal profession, which is sorely needed. According to the latest census data, people of color comprise approximately 11.6 percent of lawyers, a far cry from their 36.3 percent representation in the United States population. The data also shows that the legal profession is less diverse than most other major professions. A key reason is that law schools turn away a disparate number of applicants of color as compared to Caucasian ones. Specifically, data for 2000 through 2009 from the Law School Admissions Council indicates that nearly half of all Hispanic law school applicants and nearly two-thirds of all African-American law school applicants during this 10-year period were denied admission to every ABA-accredited law school to which they applied, compared to just about one-third of Caucasian applicants.¹

INCREASING DIVERSITY AND CREATING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS AND LEADERS

By E. Christopher Johnson Jr.

College Pipeline Programs

One of the remedies for this disparity is the development of pipeline programs. An example of a college-based program is Thomas M. Cooley Law School's month-long, pre-law institute for college sophomores, which provides LSAT prep and coursework in critical thinking and reasoning, legal topics, and professional responsibility. Our partners are the Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) and Oakland University. When CLEO suffered federal budget cuts in 2011, law firms, bar associations, and State Bar sections graciously contributed \$10,000 in substitute funding to save the program.²

High-School Pipeline Programs

On the high-school side, an example is the Street Law Diversity Pipeline Program that the General Motors legal staff started with Street Law in 2004. Key collaborators have been one of GM's outside counsel, Dykema Gossett, and the University of Detroit Mercy, Wayne State University, and Cooley law schools. This program, still active under the leadership of Paul Zavala and other members of the GM legal staff, places lawyers and other legal professionals in Detroit and Pontiac high-school classrooms and features a day-long immersion with a mock trial or mock negotiation exercise. GM has also offered summer internships and scholarships to students in this program. Another example is Project Future, a drug abuse and crime prevention program developed by Cooley Professor Monica Nuckolls and her father, Judge M. T. Thompson Jr., who were honored as 2011 State Bar Champions of Justice for the program's success in Saginaw and Pontiac. This year, Cooley also started what we hope to be a long-term collaboration with the Just The Beginning Foundation on a week-long program for high-school students at the federal courthouse in Detroit.

Clerkship and Grade-School Pipeline Programs

Judge Victoria Roberts featured prominently in this effort as she has in other pipeline activities, including the Wolverine Bar Association Judicial Clerkship Program. In the latter program,

which she founded, Judge Roberts asks her colleagues on the Eastern District bench to retain a student of color as a summer law clerk. Here again, the local bar stepped up to help fund 18 clerks this past summer. Examples at the grade-school level include those championed in Pontiac by Judge Fred Mester through the Pontiac Alumni Foundation and City Mission in Detroit's Brightmoor neighborhood, which graduates 83 percent of its students from high school. Students from City Mission's K-5 Academy now move on to a promising new middle school and high school, the University Yes Academy, whose Houston counterpart has graduated 100 percent of its seniors and sends 100 percent of those graduates to four-year colleges.

Making Pipeline Programs "Absorbent"

In addition to trying to connect these programs, it is important to make the pipeline "absorbent" so students can enter at any point. Our experience is that transitioning directly from, say, a high-school program to a college program is not necessarily the primary way students enter a pipeline program. Rather, in filling our sophomore pre-law programs, we reached out to pre-law advisors around the country and used word of mouth through churches and other community-based organizations. We discovered one student through For the Seventh Generation, a Detroit Metropolitan Bar Foundation program that provides nonlegal services to wards of the court. Hence, we are looking to establish relationships with organizations at local and national levels such as the United Negro College Fund, Boys and Girls Clubs, National Urban League, Hispanic National Bar Foundation, National Bar Foundation, and special-purpose and local bar associations so they can steer promising students of color to pipeline programs. Another tool to link these programs and provide absorbency is the database of pipeline programs funded and maintained by the Law School Admissions Council and ABA Council on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Educational Pipeline.³

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The Pipeline to West Point

The United States Military Academy at West Point provides a nonlegal example of the absorbent pipeline principle. West Point starts its pipeline programs with science, technology, math, and engineering programs in grades six through eight and continues with SAT and ACT prep in ninth grade, leadership institutes in eleventh grade, and a one-year preparatory school for high-school graduates who could benefit from additional schooling before enrolling at West Point. Students can enter this pipeline at any point. Academy leaders recognize that all the students cannot attend West Point and become U.S. Army officers. However, these programs are also designed to produce ethical leaders who will benefit society.

Alternative Benefit—Create Responsible Citizens and Leaders

This brings us back to the alternative benefit of pipeline programs—creating responsible citizens and leaders, a benefit confirmed by school administrators who reported that students returning from GM Street Law internships demonstrated positive leadership and served as role models for younger students. West Point's experience is similar. These programs also benefit society by helping to keep the students and those they influence out of the school-to-prison and human trafficking pipelines. A 2009 American Civil Liberties Union report entitled *Michigan's Throwaway Kids: Students Trapped in the School-to-Prison Pipeline* documents the disproportionate number of students of African descent who are expelled or receive lengthy suspensions and eventually drop out of school and face a higher risk of ending up in prison. Similarly, the ABA Commission on Youth at Risk reports that youth in urban and other underprivileged areas are more vulnerable to the enticements of human traffickers because many do not have much hope beyond a life on the streets. This could potentially make them susceptible to being trafficked into sex or labor slavery.

The Definition of Success

Success in pipeline programs is also evident as students of color become lawyers. Since 1968, CLEO programs have produced more than 3,000 lawyers who are people of color or economically disadvantaged, including U.S. Congressman Hansen Clarke. Kwame Rowe, an African-American student who participated in GM's Street Law program as a summer intern six years ago, is another example. He recently graduated from Michigan State University and will start law school at Cooley this year. An example of someone who did not come from a legal pipeline program is a young man from the east side of Detroit who won a scholarship from A Better Chance. He excelled in the program, which placed economically disadvantaged but academically promising students in private prep schools. He went on to graduate from Harvard and NYU School of Law, currently maintains a successful law practice, and is the immediate past president of the State Bar of Michigan. Yes, I refer to Tony Jenkins!

Over the past 20 years, I have been blessed to see the difference these programs make in the lives of young people, helping them both in their educational pursuits and in becoming responsible citizens and leaders. President John F. Kennedy perhaps said it best: "Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation." ■



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FOOTNOTES

1. The statistics are extracted from an article I wrote with Dean John Nussbaumer, entitled "The Door to Law School," which also discusses the reasons and some remedies for this disparity. See 6 U Mass Roundtable Symp LJ 1 (2011).
2. For a more detailed description of the program and list of contributors, see <http://www.cooley.edu/newsevents/2011/061411_prelaw_summer_program.html> (accessed December 13, 2011).
3. See <http://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/diversity_pipeline.html> (accessed December 13, 2011).

