

## Help Fill the Public Education Gap, Diversify the Profession with CLEO

*By Chipu Nyambuya*

The Council on Legal Education (CLEO) is governed by a council composed of members from the American Bar Association (ABA), National Bar Association, Hispanic National Bar Association, National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, National Native American Bar Association, Association of American Law Schools, Society of American Law Teachers, and Law School Admission Counsel.

In the past twenty years, there has been a proliferation of programs created to fill the diversity gap in the legal profession. But despite these efforts, a recent study by the American Bar Foundation found that between 2000 and 2009 the number of minority lawyers remained stagnant at just 10 percent of the total number of attorneys in the United States, with not a single minority group comprising more than 4.5 percent of attorneys. In light of these statistics, diversity proponents are questioning what more can be done. While part of the problem is retention, there is also the belief that the problem is deeper and rooted in the failure of the public education system to prepare minority students for a career in the law.

The Washington D.C.-based Council on Legal Education (CLEO), founded in 1968 as a not-for-profit project of the ABA's Fund for Justice and Education to expand opportunities for minority and low-income students to attend law school, believes filling the diversity gap starts with education. When CLEO was founded, the conventional wisdom was that a sufficient pool of qualified students was available and that all that was needed were interventions seeking to increase student access to and success in law school. CLEO worked with institutions such as the network of Historically Black Colleges and Universities on CLEO's seminal program, the Six Week Summer Institute, an annual residential program focused on exposing and preparing minority college graduates for the rigors of law school in the summer immediately preceding their first year of law school.

Over the years, CLEO developed programs for building on the skills learned at the Six Week Summer Institute and to assist law students with the bar exam. For example, CLEO's Mid-Winter Academic Enhancement Seminar helps students to reevaluate their undergraduate and law school performance and find ways to overcome shortcomings and to build on strengths; the Mid-Winter Bar Preparation Seminar exposes third-year law students to the rigors of the bar exam with a test and analysis of the Multistate Bar Exam; and the Mid-Summer Professional Development Seminar helps law students develop professional skills for successfully positioning themselves for entry into the profession, including hosting a Career Fair attended by employers from around the country. CLEO's newest effort, The CLEO Mentoring Network, aims to foster relationships between diverse students and individuals who can give them insights into and advice about the skills and processes the students learn in their CLEO programs.

In addition to its programs for law students, ten years ago, CLEO established a comprehensive set of programs for undergraduates designed to expose them to the legal profession and provide assistance in navigating the increasing complexities and challenges of planning for and applying to law school. These programs, such as the Sophomore Summer Institute and Achieving Success in the Application Process, offer tools to help make students' law school applications competitive and options for financing a law school education. They also help develop students' intangible skills, such as networking, which will serve them through their academic and professional careers.

More recently, CLEO expanded its programs to respond to the gap left by public education and help ease the transition between high school and college. CLEO has partnered with Just the Beginning Foundation (JTBF) in its Summer Legal Institute program, which mirrors CLEO's undergraduate and law school programs and exposes secondary school students to the requirements faced by any new entrant into the legal profession and to a pre-law curriculum through the development of general legal skills and principles.

In expanding its programs to respond to the gap left by public education, CLEO has remained mindful of the need to keep its focus on service to diverse students, many of whom live in the nation's most densely populated urban areas. With that in mind, in late 2009 CLEO launched a Midwest Regional Office in Chicago, the first in what will eventually be a series of regional offices. This regional structure will expand access to CLEO resources and support, strengthen CLEO's localized partner relationships, and provide supplementary programming.

CLEO is seeking young lawyers to volunteer as facilitators, panelists, and content writers for our programs. To find out more, please contact Chipu Nyambuya at [chipu@cleoscholars.org](mailto:chipu@cleoscholars.org) or (312) 207-2426. With your help, CLEO can continue to deliver on its mission to help diverse students find success on their path to the legal profession.

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