

SHOWING THE WAY

Three leading firm diversity programs are expanding in 2013.

WHEN NATALIE REID, AN African American ninth-year associate at Debevoise & Plimpton, got a phone call from her firm's presiding partner, Michael Blair, in early 2012, asking if she was interested in being the firm's Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) fellow, she hesitated. How would she balance the program, a highly structured mentoring and training program that lasts throughout the entire year, with her demanding international litigation practice? Ultimately, a talk with Debevoise's fellow from the previous year, counsel Richard Robinson Jr., helped her decide. "He told me if I couldn't make time for this program, then I'm crazy," says Reid.

While law firm diversity programs have been around for years, some of the marquee programs are looking to expand this year. Enrollment in the LCLD fellows program, which began in 2011, started with 125 that year, and increased to 135 in 2012. The program will likely increase to 145 this year, with 10 additional firms and companies joining as participants. The LCLD 1L Scholar program for first-year law students, also in its third year, has seen its participants increase threefold, from 46 in 2011 to 152 in 2012, and is also expected to grow. LCLD executive director Robert Grey Jr., a government relations partner at Hunton & Williams, says that the expansion was a result of an increased

interest from law firms, saying simply: "We have more members this year than the year before."

A separate program, run by nonprofit Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO), targets minority college students, and has branched out from one city to four, with a fifth city being added this year.

Last year, 71 Am Law 200 firms each had a LCLD fellow, and this year the number is expected to increase, although the final number of fellows won't be decided until later this month. Up-and-coming lawyers are offered guidance, networking, and training to help them rise into leadership positions in firms or in-house. The program includes three quarterly conferences with



alongside traditional summer associates. "By taking 1Ls [into the Scholars program], we've created a network for them while giving them an opportunity that few 1Ls get, enabling them to be more competitive in seeking summer associate jobs after their second year," says pipeline committee chair Laura Stein, who's also general counsel of The Clorox Company.

Meanwhile, SEO's Law Program aims to bolster minority

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other fellows, Am Law managing partners, and general counsel at Fortune 500 companies, as well as various events and training sessions throughout the year.

For fledgling lawyers, the 1L Scholars program gives minority students an entree into large firms. The scholars, who have finished their first year of law school, work at top law firms or companies

ranks by recruiting college students thinking about applying to law school. The program provides summer associate-style internships for prospective minority and women law students (dubbed "0Ls") at nearly 30 Am Law 100 firms, including Cravath, Swaine & Moore, Jones Day, and Kirkland & Ellis. While the program has been around since the mid-1990s,

it was confined to New York City until 2009, when it added Washington D.C., and then expanded to Houston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. This year, another SEO city—either Dallas, Chicago, or Atlanta—will be added to the roster. SEO is expected to announce the new city early this year. "It's our goal to make our students hireable once they're in law school, and also open their minds to the idea that firm life might not be so bad," says program manager Luisa Ewing, a graduate of the program who joined Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton as an associate in 2008. Ewing notes that of the interns in the 2010 class—the most recent group of interns to complete two years of law school—approximately 70 percent of them will start at an SEO-partnered law firm for the fall of 2013.

While the the directors of the programs acknowledge that their efforts have only modestly increased diversity at law firms, they maintain that they've built an important pipeline that could lead to far greater diversity in five to 10 years. "When you've got 100 [minority and female lawyers] here and 100 there, you're not sure if that means you're moving the needle," says LCLD's Grey. "But we're getting good feedback anecdotally, and we believe these lawyers are more confident and more competitive by having had the [LCLD] experience."

—VICTOR LI



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