

Diversity law group summer intern program at high level

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The Philadelphia Diversity Law Group, a consortium of local legal employers attempting to improve minority recruitment and retention numbers, has seen its summer internship program participation rebound to its highest point since it began in 2003.

The uptick comes after it was negatively affected by several law firms deciding to suspend or cancel their summer intern programs in 2009 and 2010.



Lois Kimbol, a retired Dechert partner who runs the program for PDLG, said this summer there will be 34 students working at 30 employers, compared to 29 students in 2010 and 27 students in 2009 and 32 in 2008. She said the numbers increased this year

Banks

largely because of the fact that several law firms returned to the program this year and the organization was able to recruit a new company, Voorhees, N.J.-based American Waterworks Co., to accept a student as a summer intern in its legal department.

The program was designed to recruit minority law students to spend the summer at Philadelphia firms after their first year of schooling. After candidates are initially screened by PDLG officials, employers are randomly sent two or three students to interview, at least one of whom is selected.

The students are all 1Ls, meaning they have finished their first year of law school. Firms usually focus their summer internship programs on 2Ls, students with two years' experience, because 1Ls often do not return for a second summer at the same firm and are longer shots for permanent employment. But PDLG officials have said getting the students early has allowed local firms to better sell themselves and the city as a place to practice law to those contemplating working in other markets.

The program started with 12 students participating in 2003 and rapidly grew to the point where virtually every major law firm and some of the region's largest corporations each took a student for the summer.

Kimbol said the big difference this year is that



Law of diversity

Stradley Ronon partner Danielle Banks (center) with two summer interns: Cherelle Glimp of Columbia Law School '13 and John Belinga of Villanova Law School, '13. Both have benefited from the Philadelphia Diversity Law Group's intern program.

more PDLG students from last summer's program were able to obtain summer jobs on their own as 2Ls than the class before them.

"It was tough for 2Ls last summer," Kimbol said.

Of the 29 PDLG students from last summer, 25 are known to have secured jobs and 19 have done so at PDLG employers.

One positive development for the PDLG program has been the addition of the Montgomery Bar Association, which for the third year in a row used the PDLG screening process to employ law students at Montgomery County law firms. The Montgomery County eight-week program includes invites to PDLG training sessions and programming. Kimbol said virtually all of the PDLG students referred to Montgomery County accept the positions.

Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young partner Danielle Banks, who serves as PDLG's co-president, said the 1L program has helped Philadelphia's law firms improve legal minority recruitment but now the organization must focus on retention. As part of the 10 year anniversary of its founding, PDLG plans to unveil a

new program to help with that effort. It calls for a rainmaking lawyer to effectively adopt a minority associate as a protégé of sorts.

"I had [Stradley partner and former Philadelphia Bar Association Chancellor] Andre Dennis as my practice mentor and [Stradley Chairman] Bill Sasso as my business mentor and that was critical to my success," Banks said.

Banks would also like to catch up with past PDLG participants and see where they are working and living today to gauge the true effect of the program.

Kimbol said PDLG started a mentoring program for writing a few years ago for program participants.

"Law schools teach a more academic form of writing while law firms use a more practical approach," Kimbol said. "So we thought this would help them adjust quicker."

PDLG will also offer its second annual boot camp for students from a diverse background who are entering law school. Held next month, the week of programming includes professors discussing what to expect in basic classes. Kimbol said 70 students participated last year.