

# Foundation Awards Diversity Grants to the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Chapter and the Veterans and Military Law Section

by Sarah Perlman



*Sarah Perlman was the managing editor for The Federal Lawyer.*

The Diversity Grant Committee of the Foundation of the Federal Bar Association awarded two inaugural Diversity Grants in June 2017. The Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Chapter received \$7,000 to help support the Summer Work Experience in Law (SWEL) program, and the committee awarded \$3,000 to the Veterans and Military Law Section (VMLS) for the “Advocating for Veterans in Indian Country” educational program.

## **The Diversity Grants are The Foundation's Newest Community outreach Initiative**

“The foundation supports multiple legal outreach efforts every year, and we saw a need for the FBA membership to support educational and community service projects that aim to promote diversity and eliminate bias,” said Martha Hardwick Hofmeister, a member of the inaugural Diversity Grant Committee. “We were pleased to award the first of these grants to the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Chapter and the Veterans and Military Law Section and look forward to successful outcomes.”

## **Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Chapter**

With the \$7,000 grant from the foundation, the chapter has worked to help SWEL expand its mission of promoting diversity in the legal profession through development of minorities interested in the practice of law. The chapter and the legal communities in Cincinnati, Dayton, and Columbus all greatly benefit from SWEL's work in developing students both professionally and personally while exploring careers in the law.

The chapter requested the grant to provide additional students opportunities in the eight-week summer program and increase participant exposure to the judicial and government sector through funded federal and state internships. Foundation funding further permits SWEL to increase its recently expanded presence in the Dayton and Columbus markets. In addition, SWEL will use the contribution to support the students' annual law school tour, provide addition-

al academic assistance in the classroom, facilitate pre/post diagnostic assessments, develop weekly writing assignments, chaperone leadership and community service activities, and to provide program supplies, manuals, legal resource materials, and, when necessary, snacks for the students.

The chapter has a long-standing relationship and its members are significantly invested with SWEL. The chapter's former president, Kenneth Parker, is the president of SWEL, and Chapter Vice President Bryce Lenox is a board member of SWEL, responsible for SWEL's summer curriculum. Susan Dlott, a former chief judge of the Southern District of Ohio and chapter member, is also a board member of SWEL. Former Chapter President Pierre Bergeron and current Chapter President Dan Donnellon have given presentations at SWEL. Many of the firms that hire SWEL students significantly participate in the chapter.

In 2015, the chapter voted unanimously to become a named supporter of SWEL, making a \$10,000 donation in the name of the former Chapter President Parker to further the organization's mission and objectives. This placed the chapter in the midst of the Cincinnati Bar Association, SWEL's longtime local supporter.

SWEL works primarily to help African-American students make an informed decision with respect to entering law school and the legal profession. It sets the stage for each student's own self-discovery by exposing them to the inherent opportunities and challenges of practicing law through summer work experiences, coaching, and networking. SWEL's vision is to be the best decision-development program for African-American students and others who may need assistance and who have an interest in the legal profession.

“As chapter president, I was thrilled that the foundation granted the funding request for SWEL that allows minority and underprivileged students the opportunity to shadow lawyers on a summer break,” said Donnellon of Bingham Greenebaum Doll LLP. “SWEL is a tremendous organization which continues

to inspire students who are otherwise overlooked to pursue a career in law. Ken Parker has devoted much of his personal time and money to support the great work of SWEL. The foundation funding makes increasing the number of participating law firms and the events for the students more achievable.”

“As our community and country grow more culturally diverse, and as clients require diversity from the companies that represent them, it is critical that the legal profession become more representative of the changing racial demographics in the region,” Donnellon said. “SWEL’s goals of diversity in the legal community align with those of the chapter and the Federal Bar Association nationally.”

The SWEL program includes legal internships as well as weekly forums and seminars to offer students firsthand experience within the legal profession so they may gain exposure to the legal process and be prepared for the rigors of law school. Implementation of SWEL’s curriculum process offers academic preparation for law school through writing exercises, personal statement development, LSAT practice, logic games, essays, leadership skills critical to workplace success, team-building exercises, and critical reading assignments of actual reported cases, as well as a community service and

By offering the training in the West (e.g., Montana), the VMLS hopes to draw attendees from various tribes and tribal organizations throughout the region. Additionally, the VMLS works to collaborate with Veteran’s Affairs Office of Tribal Government Relations to invite regional VA staff working to increase access to health care and services in Indian country.

“In our efforts to serve veterans, the members of the section felt that Indian country is an area in great need,” said Jim Richardson, VMLS chair. “Native Americans serve their country in numbers far beyond their proportion of the general population. They deserve strong advocates who can make a difference in their lives. This program provides education and training to increase diversity among these advocates.”

The program’s primary focus is advocacy on behalf of veterans seeking VA benefits, including preparation of claims, appealing a VA decision to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals, and cultural competence in advocating for veterans with mental health symptoms. Additional topics include Veterans Treatment Courts, advocating for patient-centered Native health care services for veterans, current legislative issues relevant to veterans in Indian country, and econom-

## **In 2015, the chapter voted unanimously to become a named supporter of SWEL, making a \$10,000 donation in the name of the former Chapter President Kenneth Parker to further the organization’s mission and objectives.**

fundraising activity during the summer program.

As for actual outcomes, since 1988, more than 100 SWEL students have attended law school, many of whom are now practicing in Cincinnati and throughout Ohio. Each year, SWEL selects between 25 and 35 students, with 29 students served in 2016. Last year, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals’ Clerk’s Office agreed to take a SWEL student, a placement that enable the program to expand throughout the circuit to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Michigan.

Recruitment resources include area public and private high schools, colleges and universities, law-related and pre-law academic programs, youth agencies and referrals from current SWEL students and alumni. SWEL’s geographic expansion beyond metro Cincinnati helps incorporate the aims of the federal judiciary in Dayton and Columbus and also serves the mission of diversity of the FBA’s Dayton, Ohio, chapter.

The chapter will continue to remain invested in SWEL through continuous participation in SWEL networking, classroom, and social activities, as well as seeking potential additional funding through chapter reserve capital. The SWEL partnership is promoted locally through chapter events, including chapter-sponsored lunches and dinners and through its monthly newsletter. SWEL will also continue to promote its partnership with the chapter, and this year the program is planning a highly publicized dinner for its 30th anniversary during which it will acknowledge its local, regional, and national supporters.

### **Veterans and Military Law Section**

The VMLS’s Section’s objective in offering the “Advocacy for Veterans in Indian Country” program is to educate advocates who will work with veterans in Indian country, providing necessary training for accreditation as a veterans service officer.

ic development for veterans in Indian country.

But more broadly, the VMLS program functions to advance several of the Federal Bar Association’s strategic efforts by promoting the education and professional development of attorneys practicing in the areas of federal law, including the law governing veterans benefits and Indian law. The section’s grant enables the program to improve the education of diverse advocates, which in turn leads to improvements in national advocacy for all veterans. The program also serves to strengthen connections among federal practitioners across the country and create new lines of networking in the federal bar.

Finally, the program explores best practices for representing veterans in Indian country, which advances the Federal Bar Association’s dedication to excellence in continuing legal education. The foundation congratulates these outstanding recipients of the first Diversity Grants. We wish you all the best in 2018! ©

### **Editorial Policy**

*The Federal Lawyer* is the magazine of the Federal Bar Association. It serves the needs of the association and its members, as well as those of the legal profession as a whole and the public.

*The Federal Lawyer* is edited by members of its Editorial Board, who are all members of the Federal Bar Association. Editorial and publication decisions are based on the board’s judgment.

The views expressed in *The Federal Lawyer* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the association or of the Editorial Board. Articles and letters to the editor in response are welcome.