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Summer Law Institute for Teens

07.23.2009 | Law Minorities make up about 15 percent of Ohio's population but only about 5 percent of Ohio's lawyers. Nationwide, there is about a 20-point disparity in those numbers.

Six Ohio law schools, including the University of Dayton School of Law, are hosting a program for minorities entering high school with the intention it will start a pipeline toward the legal profession.

The Law and Leadership Summer Institute runs July 6 through Aug. 6 at the University of Dayton School of Law. Students will learn skills useful in legal studies that could carry into other professions, according to Maxine Thomas, executive director of the Law and Leadership Summer Institute.

Approximately 30 students in the University of Dayton program will put their skills to use in a mock trial competition from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 6, in the University of Dayton School of Law's Mat Heck courtroom. They will practice for the competition Aug. 3-5.

In the meantime, students will participate in class work, listen to guest speakers who include local judges and lawyers, and take field trips to places such as the 2nd District of Ohio Appellate Court, the Kettering Municipal Court and the law firm of Sebaly Shillito & Dyer.

"This group of students have worked very hard this summer, but they have each benefited academically from this immersion in legal studies," said Dennis Greene, the University of Dayton law professor directing the School of Law's program.

After the program, the students will return for biweekly sessions through the end of high school.

A pilot version of the program ran last summer at The Ohio State University and Cleveland State University.

"We taught the students how to prepare opening statements for trial and Ohio criminal law through games like Jeopardy!," said Simone Booth, University of Dayton Black Law Student Association president, who was an instructor at last summer's Law and Leadership Summer Institute in Columbus. "We also tried to find movies they were familiar with to demonstrate such topics as jury selection, cross examination and examining witnesses. At the end of the program, we prepared the students to be lawyers for the prosecution and defense and to be witnesses in their own mock trial.

"We started out with (students) who seemed scared to death and seemed to be wondering what they had gotten themselves into, and we ended with future attorneys who did not want to leave the program, their new friends and their teachers and mentors."

The Law & Leadership Summer Institute, based on New York City's Legal Outreach, is a partnership between the Supreme Court of Ohio, the Ohio Bar Association, the Ohio Center for Law-Related Education and all nine Ohio law schools.

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