

THE MENTOR PROGRAM: BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

As lawyers, our *pro bono* and professional imperative should include the important duty to explain to the public our profession; the way the courts function; and the opportunities, entitlements and obligations created by our system of laws. The Mentor Program ("Mentor") affords an ideal and highly effective way to do this. Founded in New York City in 1983,¹ and implemented at Seton Hall Law School in 1987,² the program establishes a unique partnership between attorneys, law students and high school students.

Mentor is a vehicle through which attorneys, judges, law faculty and law students enrich the high school curriculum. The program helps high school students to recognize and to explore the impact of the law on their daily lives, while increasing their awareness and appreciation of their legal rights and responsibilities. Young people are provided direct access to the legal profession and enhanced understanding, through observation and participation, of the workings of our system of justice. Attendantly, the Mentor partnerships³ foster and nurture in law students and practitioners the commitment to community service, to making the law and justice available to all, and to exalting, by words and deeds, the highest standards of professionalism.

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¹ See *infra* notes 3-4 and accompanying text.

² See *infra* notes 5-12 and accompanying text.

³ See *infra* note 9 and accompanying text.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Mentor Program was devised and first launched in New York City in 1983, under the leadership of founder Thomas W. Evans, Esq., a senior partner with the law firm of Mudge, Rose, Guthrie, Alexander & Ferdon.⁴ The very successful New York City program pairs more than forty high schools with law firms⁵ and has inspired replication at sites throughout the nation.⁶ The New York City model, however, as initially conceived, did not contain a law school component. In 1987, Seton Hall Law School became the first institution in the country to formulate a law school component to the Mentor Program, and then to implement Mentor in Newark, New Jersey, under the auspices and leadership of a law school.⁷

In cooperation with the Newark Board of Education's School Partnerships Program,⁸ the Seton Hall Law School Mentor Program pairs all of the Newark high schools with law firms, public sector law offices and teams of Seton Hall law students.⁹ Beyond its principal work on behalf of the Newark schools, the Program facilitates "satellite" partnerships in locales including Bergen,¹⁰ Middlesex,¹¹ Morris,¹² Hudson¹³ and Mercer Counties.¹⁴ More-

⁴ The New York Alliance for the Public Schools and the Federal Bar Council co-sponsored the implementation of the New York City Mentor Program. Until 1990, the New York City program was coordinated by Ms. Judy Breck. It is now administered under the aegis of the Justice Resource Center and is directed by Ms. Debra Lesser.

⁵ My efforts on behalf of the New York City Mentor Program began in 1984, when, as an associate with the law firm of Cahill Gordon & Reindel, I coordinated aspects of the firm's participation.

⁶ The National Mentor Program, a coalition of all Mentor sites and a central repository for information, was formed in 1990. Justice Thurgood Marshall and Marilyn Tucker Quayle, Esq. serve as Honorary Chair, and Jo Rosner, Esq. is director of the National Mentor Program.

⁷ For additional background on the launching and goals of the Seton Hall Law School Mentor Program, see *Profile—A Lesson in Dreams*, N.J. LAWYER 12 (March/April 1990).

⁸ Since its inception, the Program has benefitted greatly from the initiatives and guidance of Mr. Peter Ruccione, Coordinator of the Newark Board of Education's School Partnerships Program.

⁹ The Newark law firm/high school partnerships include Robinson, St. John & Wayne, paired with St. Benedict's Preparatory High School; Carpenter, Bennett & Morrissey, paired with University High School; LeBoeuf, Lamb, Leiby & MacRae, paired with Westside High School; McCarter & English, paired with Weequahic High School; Meyner & Landis, paired with Central High School; and Crummy, Del Deo, Dolan, Griffinger & Vecchione, paired with Arts High School.

¹⁰ In 1992, the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office joined the Mentor Program.

¹¹ A recently formed and already very successful Mentor partnership teams the law firm of Wilentz, Goldman & Spitzer with South Plainfield High School.

over, the Mentor Program is now being implemented on a comprehensive statewide basis, thanks to the initiatives and leadership of the New Jersey State Bar Foundation.¹⁵

Seton Hall law students actively direct the Newark Mentor partnerships, with the guidance of a faculty director¹⁶ and the leadership of law student directors.¹⁷ An executive board of law students serve as team captains and liaisons to the high schools and participating law firms.¹⁸ Additionally, as noted, the Program enjoys the support and assistance of the Coordinator of the Newark Board of Education's School Partnerships Program.¹⁹

Sixty law students participate voluntarily in the Mentor Program each year. As part of their mentoring obligation, our law students implement a series of "Law Days" for their respective high school teams, coordinate all aspects of the Annual Mentor Moot Court Competition, publish *The Mentor Review* (a bi-annual publication), conduct presentations in the high school classrooms, and assist with attorney-sponsored trips to federal and state courts and attorney-hosted visits to the participating law firms.

The attorney mentors afford the high school students exposure to the practice of law, both in and out of the courtroom. At their paired law firms, students view depositions, participate in roundtable discussions on the role of lawyers and the law, and

¹² The Morris County Explorers, comprised of high school students with an interest in a career in the law, are led by nearby attorney mentors.

¹³ In 1991, Kenmare High School, located in Jersey City, New Jersey, joined the Mentor Program.

¹⁴ Attorneys from the law firm of Stark & Stark serve as mentors to high school students in the Mercer County area. Additionally, another very successful mentoring program was implemented in Mercer and Camden Counties, under the auspices of the New Jersey State Bar Association's Minorities in the Legal Profession Section, thanks to the leadership of Robert Tillman, Esq.

¹⁵ The New Jersey State Bar Foundation is a non-profit organization founded to carry out educational programs aimed at advancing public understanding of the legal system.

¹⁶ I have served as Faculty Director of the Program since its inception.

¹⁷ The Student Directors for the present 1992-93 term are John Johnson ('93), Marti Robinson ('93) and Greg Smith ('93), and the Associate Directors are Angelo Dattolo ('94), Thomas Bigosinski ('94) and Karen Lally ('94).

¹⁸ The 1992 Executive Board included law students Kim Adams, Bart Barre, Darwin Beauvais, Dennis Bullett, Larry Calegari, Andrea Carter, Cassandra Corbett, Tyrone Davis, Phillip Duffy, Dawn Duverney, Marva Hardee, Kimberly Holmes, Kelly Johnson, Jim Kiick, Greg Lender, John Marshall, Wanda Mabray, Lisa Rabke, Rhonda Roberts, Leon Maundy, Gloria Ramsey, Tom Snyder, Greg Smith, Cindy Spera, Lorraine Vargas, Patricia Waite, Jean Wesh, Glorina Williams, Marti Robinson, Sabrina Holmes and Ed Marable.

¹⁹ See *supra* note 8.

engage in moot court preparation. During attorney-guided visits to court, students observe trials and appellate arguments. These excursions serve as meaningful catalysts for discussion and active learning.

The components of the Mentor Program, as implemented at the Law School, are set forth below. Each of these elements aims to demystify the legal process while communicating that a career in the law is an attainable and worthy pursuit. Above all, the Program stresses the importance of setting personal and professional goals, no matter the chosen context, and of committing oneself wholeheartedly to the realization of those aspirations.

1. The Road to Law School and the Lawyer as a Professional: Mentor "Law Days" at Seton Hall Law School

The high school students' first meeting at the law school begins with presentations by law faculty, administrators, and law students on the role of the law and lawyers in our lives. This orientation meeting sets the central theme for the program: the precept that the law is a noble profession and a powerful instrument. Those trained to wield this formidable instrument are by definition powerful, in a privileged position to transform for the better the world around them. Faculty and law students share with the high school guests their visions of professionalism and professional responsibility, offering personal insights on the factors and inspiration that led each to a career in the law. The high school students then participate in roundtable discussions on timely legal issues, audit law classes, observe computer-assisted legal research and, coached by their law student mentors, engage in moot court proceedings.

2. Lawyers and Law Students in the High School Classrooms

Attorneys and law students conduct presentations at the high schools, during which they speak about the legal profession and discuss topical law-related matters. These discussions have included issues such as the propriety and constitutionality of mandatory AIDS and drug testing in high schools, the accommodation of First Amendment rights and administrative discretion when a high school principal seeks to restrain publication of a certain high school newspaper editorial, and students' Fourth

Amendment rights when faced with a random locker search policy.

3. "Law Days" at the Participating Law Firms

High school classes spend time at the law firms or public sector law offices with which they are paired, observing their mentor attorneys at work, attending mock depositions, and learning first hand about good lawyering.

4. Federal and State Court Visits

Attorney and law student mentors select a case, provide background, and then take students to court. Judges often spend time with the students during these visits. At lunch, students discuss their reactions with their mentor lawyers and law students. Particular emphasis is placed on the courtroom conduct of counsel and the judge. Questions explored include: What duties does a trial lawyer owe, and to whom? How would a good lawyer uphold his or her duty to his or her client, the court and opposing parties and counsel?

5. Mentor Moot Court

This is the culminating event of the year, where high school student "attorneys," coached by their mentor lawyers and law students, argue a hypothetical appellate case before members of the bench, bar and law faculty. Consistently, the student advocates are meticulously well-prepared, eloquent, and enthusiastic.²⁰ The Mentor Moot Court takes place at Seton Hall Law School, and enjoys the active support and participation of the law school's administration and faculty, as well as the bench and bar.²¹

SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

A. *Specific Goals and Objectives*

The Mentor Program is a highly successful collaborative en-

²⁰ One student, a successful participant in a recent Mentor Moot Court, commented: "I learned that there are words and ideas in my head that I never knew were there before."

²¹ The then reigning Miss America, Ms. Marjorie Vincent, delivered the keynote address at the 1991 Moot Court Competition. Ms. Vincent, on leave from Duke Law School, spoke of her experiences as a law student while commenting upon her hopes for the future of the legal profession. See *There She Is . . . at Newark Pupils' Law Contest*, THE STAR LEDGER, Apr. 22, 1991.

terprise, building important and enduring bridges to the community. Its effectiveness is best gauged in view of the project's specific goals and objectives. These are:

1. To provide high school students, and particularly inner-city youth, with attorney and law student role models, as well as access to a more realistic and responsive view of the legal profession;

2. To guide high school students to recognize the impact of the law on their daily lives while becoming more aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens;

3. To foster in law students and practitioners the commitment to community service, to making the law and our legal system available to all, and to aspiring to the highest standards of professionalism, so as to inspire the same in others;

4. To provide an effective pro bono vehicle through which attorneys and law students can educate and explain to the public the opportunities, entitlements and obligations created by our legal system;

5. To develop a lawyer-to-law student and lawyer/law student-to-high school student mentoring program.

B. Evaluation of the Program's Impact

The Mentor Program's effectiveness has been measured in numerous ways. At the conclusion of each mentor event, the high school student participants complete evaluation forms, providing detailed observations and critiques. The students indicate what they learned and how the experience matched (or did not match) their expectations. Consistently, these evaluations are outstanding. For example, one student wrote: "I have learned that alot of the misconceptions I had about law and lawyers were just that: misconceptions . . . I hope that other students in other schools get to experience what I experienced today with the case simulation and the sitting in on law school classes." Another commented that "[t]oday's program gave me even more inspiration to become a lawyer. It showed me what to expect. I already knew it would be hard work, but now I know that there is a brighter side to law school." Another student concluded "[t]hank you for talking to us on our level, and for relating to us personally. It's good to know that we have people who care about the

future of young adults."²²

Because the mentoring relationship with each high school class is ongoing, the impact of the program on student behavior is also observed. Teachers report that their mentor classes demonstrate an enhanced appreciation and understanding of the legal system, learn important lessons about self-respect and respect for all others, and express heightened enthusiasm for their own career aspirations.²³ Students who intend ultimately to enter the legal profession find that they can now place their aspirations into a practical setting. Moreover, evaluations suggest that some of the greatest benefits come to those students who had not intended to enter the law, or even to go to college. After participating in the program, these students have a greater interest in their studies and in developing and attaining career goals.²⁴

Attorney and law student evaluations of the program are

²² Detailed evaluation summaries are retained and on file at Seton Hall Law School.

²³ In the words of Ms. Cheryl LuSane, a teacher in the History Department of Newark, New Jersey's Arts High School:

This is my second year bringing students from Arts and your program is even more dynamic. My students seem really inspired. One boy in particular, who usually shows little interest in school, caught on to Prof. Franzese's lesson on Property and is transforming before my eyes! I know that this student in particular will leave here today with a different sense of his possibilities. . . . Thank you for a program that obviously is shaped with the very best wishes for my students.

Letter from Cheryl LuSane, Teacher, Arts High School, to Seton Hall Law School (October 24, 1990).

²⁴ These findings are consistent with the results of evaluations of the New York City Mentor Program, conducted by the Evaluation Unit of the New York City Board of Education. The evaluation of the pilot program noted:

[T]he school where the fewest students were college-bound showed the most pronounced effect on the way students behaved in school. These students gave responses such as "I respect my teachers more" and "I watch everything more carefully now; I respect school rules."

Describing the impact of the Mentor Program on the high school participants, a subsequent evaluation stated:

Seventy-two percent of the students interviewed said that Mentor had altered their attitudes toward the law. Some said Mentor increased their desire to become attorneys. Others said that the program helped them to realize the complexity of the legal system in the United States and that law really was more fair than they had initially believed. . . . Interestingly, two out of the five students interviewed from the Manhattan school [where fewer than 25% of the students will attend a four-year college] believed that they had become more law-abiding as a result of Mentor.

The Mentor Handbook 6-7 (1985).

most enthusiastic.²⁵ Law students report that their service to the program provides them with an important and enduring link to the community, while fostering a great sense of pride in their work product, self-esteem, and respect for our profession.²⁶ It is a testament to the program's success that, since its inception, the number of participating lawyers and law firms has more than tripled,²⁷ with more than sixty law students actively serving each year. Recently, the Governor of New Jersey issued a commenda-

²⁵ For example, Jennifer Cotton-Rashwan, Esq. ('91), a participant of the program for three years, wrote:

The Mentor Program may well be the spark that ignites the burning desire for the pursuit of a career in the legal profession. It helps students to become "meaningful specifics and not wandering generalities." It gives us great pleasure to serve as mentors . . . You need only read the students' comments to realize what the program means to them. It is obvious that the Mentor Program is making a positive impact in their lives.

THE MENTOR REVIEW (Spring 1991).

Frank Arleo, Esq., attorney mentor with the law firm of Robinson, St. John & Wayne, evaluated the Program by stating:

As a three year veteran of the Mentor Program, paired with St. Benedict's Preparatory School, I have witnessed first hand the many benefits conferred by the Program. Each year, I have attempted to expose the students to the practice of law both in and out of the courtroom. I have had students view depositions, trials and appellate arguments. I'm constantly amazed at how quickly these young students grasp the legal concepts and I believe that I have steered several of the students toward a legal career. To my delight, I have always found the students to be intelligent, well-mannered and eager to learn.

Letter from Frank Arleo, Esq., Attorney, Robinson, St. John & Wayne, to Seton Hall Law School (March 23, 1992).

²⁶ For example, mentor Phillip J. Duffy, Esq. ('92) wrote:

As a participant in the program and as a member of its Executive Board, I have had the tremendous privilege of working within my community to promote the fundamental tenets of our profession. . . . Although I am confident that my participation has been rewarding to the students, it has given me a sense of personal satisfaction that cannot be measured in terms of billable hours. Unlike the finite billable hour, the rewards of encouraging a young person to be the best person he or she can be are unquantifiable. . . . Mentor's response to the call of young minds is in the highest tradition of our profession.

Letter from Philip J. Duffy, Mentor, to Seton Hall Law School (April 15, 1992).

²⁷ As expressed by Pamela M. Kapsimalis, Esq., attorney mentor with the law firm of Wilentz, Goldman & Spitzer:

By working with attorneys, law students and law professors, the high school students have gained first-hand knowledge of the law, the procedures of the courtroom and the legal profession in general. The Mentor Program has also been a wonderful experience for the attorneys involved. . . . I hope that the program continues for many, many years and that high schools and law firms all over the country are able to benefit from the enlightening and rewarding experiences that the Mentor Program offers.

tion of the Mentor Program.²⁸

MENTORING AND ATTORNEY PROFESSIONALISM

The Mentor Program is a *pro bono* venture which promotes a tremendous sense of community, reminding us that together, as practitioners and as aspiring members of the legal profession, it is incumbent upon us to establish and to nurture an honorable and sacred trust with the larger community and with one another. That trust requires service, pride in one's work, self-respect, and respect for all others.

The program presents an opportunity for meaningful mentoring, learning and teaching on a myriad of levels. Attorneys serve as mentors to the high school students and also to our law students, affording them exposure to the realities of law practice while promoting a fuller understanding of professional responsibility. Law students serve as role models and inspiration to the high school participants, teaching and learning about commitment, integrity, and unselfish dedication to the welfare of others. Above all, Mentor touches and shapes the future, tapping the wealth of resources available to us as attorneys to encourage and support this nation's most vital and precious resource: its youth.

Letter from Pamela M. Kapsimalis, Attorney, Wilentz, Goldman & Spitzer, to American Bar Association (March 24, 1992).

²⁸ The Governor wrote in part:

I would like to offer my full support for the Seton Hall Law School Mentor Program, which provides high school students with a comprehensive introduction to the legal field. In addition to bolstering skills that are useful in the professional arena, and specifically the field of law, the Mentor Program heightens the social awareness and moral obligation of our future leaders.

Letter from Jim Florio, Governor, State of New Jersey, to Paula Franzese, Mentor Faculty Director, Seton Hall Law School (Feb. 27, 1991).