2011 American Bar Association Judicial Clerkship Program
By Gita Varughese, Career Services

Six Thomas Jefferson School of Law students represented the school in Atlanta, Georgia at the eleventh annual ABA Judicial Clerkship Program on February 9 - 12. The program is a collaborative effort of the ABA Presidential Advisory Council on Diversity in the Profession and the ABA Judicial Division. Adrianna Maldonado, Anthony Kim, Elizabeth Knowles, Leticia Hernandez, Najmah Brown, and Vatana Lay were awarded this honor after a rigorous evaluation process by a committee of senior administrators at Thomas Jefferson. Their selection is a credit to the many ways in which they have each contributed to our campus through academic performance, extracurricular activity, and leadership.

Thomas Jefferson was one several law schools participating in the program which provided the opportunity to meet with judges and former law clerks from all across the country. Anthony Kim said that it was a great experience to interact with the judges one-on-one and that it was “refreshing to know that there are so many people in the legal community that understand the importance of increasing diversity within the profession.” The program simulated the clerkship experience, exposed students to the daily routine in judicial chambers, and provided information regarding the application process. Elizabeth Knowles said it was extremely helpful speaking to a justice “who explained to us how he breaks down issues and analyzes them in his chambers.”

Najmah Brown commented on rarity of the occasion where “judges from all over the country dedicated their time for the purpose of interacting with law students and preparing them for working in the courts.” The program was the result of the extraordinary efforts of leaders in the legal community coming together to volunteer their time and share their wisdom.
The program gave the students and judges meaningful interaction in a small-group setting working on research and writing projects, as well as providing informational panel presentations by former law clerks. Vatana Lay described the highlight of the experience as the participating students getting the opportunity to sit in on appellate oral arguments at the Georgia Court of Appeals. The program structure allowed the students to learn directly from judges, meet a variety of lawyers, and establish a support system for diverse students seeking judicial clerkships. “I can't even describe the amount of personal and professional growth that took place during those three days,” commented Leticia Hernandez.

The students dealt directly with the issue of diversity in the legal profession throughout the program. Through presentations and discussions, the participants learned the power of the movement to diversify the bar and bench. The students gained a new respect for the legal profession and the American Bar Association’s commitment to promoting diversity. The participation in the Judicial Clerkship Program to the fullest extent possible speaks highly of Thomas Jefferson’s dedication to promoting diversity in the judiciary and throughout the legal community.