

# INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

## SUMMARY OF EVENTS FOR SPRING 2015



Siena College students Matthew Lorini (left) and Mary-Kate Browne (right) with Adjunct Professor Justin Dion '00

The Legislative Institute sponsored the Ninth Annual Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference and the summer legal fellows program with Siena College. Together with several other partners, we participated in presenting the Fair Housing Conference, which attracted over 500 attendees.

- **The Conference** offered numerous workshops and distinguished speakers. We were privileged to host Gustavo Velasquez, the assistant secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, where he leads the President's efforts to combat housing discrimination and to affirmatively further fair housing; as well as Attorney Tamar Hagler, deputy chief in the Housing and Civil Enforcement Section of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. Hagler enforces federal laws prohibiting discrimination in housing, land-use and zoning, public accommodations, and public facilities. Also presenting at the conference was Dr. Joseph McNeil, a retired major general in the United States Air Force who is best known as a member of the Greensboro Four, a group of African American college students who, in February 1960, challenged local policy of denying service to non-white customers.

The Conference also offered many workshops covering a variety of important topics. Among those were Women in the Workforce; Civil Rights Issues of American Immigrants; Debt and Democracy: How the Collection of Civil Fees and Fines Contributed to the Unrest in Ferguson; the School to Prison Pipeline and Remedying Discrimination in Education; Advanced ADA Workshop; LGBT, DV, and Sex Discrimination; and Police Best Practices: Community Policing.



Read more about the Institute at [www.law.wne.edu/ilga](http://www.law.wne.edu/ilga).

- **Siena College Summer Legal Fellows Program** We were honored to have with us again this past summer two students from the Siena College summer legal fellows program, Mary-Kate Browne and Matthew Lorini. Mary-Kate is the daughter of **Aimee Cameron Browne L'90** and **Chris Browne L'90**. For their summer research project, they worked under the supervision of **Adjunct Professor Justin Dion '00**, focusing on access to justice in bankruptcy proceedings.

Paramount to the American Justice system is access. Unfortunately, studies indicate more than one third of all Americans report being unable to access the legal system due to it being cost prohibitive, leaving millions of Americans to either sit on the courthouse steps, or in the alternative, to try to handle the matter *pro se*. To further assist the indigent gain access to Courts, most have a filing fee waiver process that allows litigants who fall below a prescriptive formula to be relieved of the filing fee costs. In bankruptcy, although not easy to navigate *pro se*, a codified procedure exists that allows the indigent to waive the filing fee.

Professor Dion, an expert on the bankruptcy process, has observed that many debtors who otherwise qualify for the fee waiver do not take advantage of the procedure. For the Siena fellows, he designed a research project to explore national databases and evaluate the status of fee waivers in bankruptcy. With the assistance of the Siena students, he expects to publish a robust article on the state of fee waivers in bankruptcy, and what proposals might increase consistency and more effective use of the fee waiver statutes. ♦