



The Claims College. Dean Stephen Johnson Talks School of Property

By Eric Gilkey, Executive Editor

The sophomore year of Claims College is right around the corner, with new students matriculating on Sept. 7-10, 2014. Among the four new schools premiering this year is the School of Property, led by Assurant Specialty Property's Stephen Johnson, the company's senior vice president and head of claims. We spoke with him to find out what students can expect, and he explains the value of a "for us, by us" approach to adjuster education.

What drew you to Claims College?

I took notice of CLM even before Claims College existed, and I saw that it was an impressive, growing organization. I saw this one-of-a-kind development in education last year—there is no other equivalent to Claims College in our industry—so when CLM Executive Director Adam Potter proposed that I lead the School of Property as a dean, I agreed immediately since property claims are a big part of our industry and I want the college to be well rounded.

So many other educational opportunities are not taught by claims professionals for an audience of like-minded peers. We are developing a comprehensive property claims curriculum for our inaugural year that will appeal to a lot of claims professionals with varying levels of experience. Those who are considering moving into property claims work, such as adjusters with experience in other lines of business, those who desire multiline experience, or students with no claims experience at all, will benefit from our courses. Even professionals with more experience and knowledge of property claims will find it beneficial because our coursework will help fill the gaps in fundamentals and reinforce skills that they may not have firmly under their belts. All can gain from networking and working through our courses with peers.

Eventually, we'll be offering what will be known as a very prestigious designation, which will be recognized by the industry. To obtain that certification, students have to attend and pass all three levels of the school, which will take students a minimum of three years to achieve.



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What's taking place this year in level one?

We have a fascinating case study that will run throughout. It will be interspersed between our more traditional course segments, where the students will be breaking out and applying what they are learning. It will really make the students think, which will be very practical and useful in their careers.

Additionally, we're organizing the courses in a logical format so that each one matches up with the life cycle of a claim. Courses for the School of Property include coverage, investigation, evaluation, and resolution, followed by a fifth course that will discuss navigating the entire landscape of property claims.

This last course, in particular, will cover a myriad of topics, including client standards, documentation, and best practices that will help tie together the environment in which property claims take place. That means it will include discussions on the regulatory environment, roles and responsibilities, common workflows and organizational structures, and stakeholders in the claims processes.

In addition to a dean, each school is comprised of an executive council. Can you explain their roles?


Each executive council member “owns” a course that I just mentioned, and they work with another knowledgeable faculty member to co-present. Our executive council includes Patrick Milone, vice president of the property services division at Custard Insurance Adjusters Inc., who will address coverage; Shane Roberts, claims director at Assurant Specialty Property, who will handle the investigation course; David Repinski, CEO of Crawford & Co., U.S. Property & Casualty, who will own the evaluation portion; and Michael Bowler, vice president of property claims for State Auto Insurance Companies, who will address resolution. The final course on navigating the landscape will be handled by David S. Williams, vice president of claims for the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association. It's quite a lineup of expertise.

What will first-year students gain from level one?

Of course we'll have very specific and technical material. It's very

important, however, that our curriculum helps our students to think like true, professional property adjusters. I want them to have a full appreciation of the process, coverages, and skills necessary to do the job successfully. In property claims, you typically have a policyholder presenting his own damages on a policy where he (or an entity) has been paying the premium himself, oftentimes for many years. That's not always the case in other lines. So this is the defining moment for the policyholder, to find out if the company he has

built a relationship with in the form of premiums will deliver on its promise. That's a huge responsibility for property adjusters.

The second thing I want our students to do is pass the final exam for each level, including this year's level one. The testing is fair, and if the students absorb the knowledge from the faculty and work hard during the classroom time and exercises, they should do very well. We are here to help our students succeed and continue to develop. 

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CLM's Claims College is one of the most powerful educational opportunities available in the insurance industry today. Students in the program complete pre-course readings, attend classroom instruction, participate in group projects, and take comprehensive exams. Now in its second year, the 2014 session will take place from Sept. 7-10, 2014, at the Downtown Philadelphia Marriott.

Each school in the Claims College is focused on a specific discipline and provides a three-year program that is designed to enable students not only to improve in their current jobs, but also to advance in their careers. This year, four new schools have been added for a total of seven. Claims College schools include:

- School of Casualty Claims
- School of Construction - NEW!
- School of Insurance Fraud - NEW!
- School of Professional Lines
- School of Property - NEW!
- School of Transportation - NEW!
- School of Workers' Compensation

Approximately 17 CE/CLE credits will be provided each year. Successful completion of all three levels of a school leads to a respected claims designation, which will become the industry standard for identifying the best and brightest claims professionals.

Seats are limited to 300 for the School of Casualty Claims and 100 for all other schools. Outside defense counsel registrations are limited to 25 students per school. Classes are filling up quickly, so register today at theclm.org/claimscollege.