

Pro Bono
Attorneys
Hold the Key
to Justice



Law Schools: Taking Pro Bono Services Seriously

Louisiana's four law schools take the concept of pro bono legal services seriously. Whether it be through a variety of law clinics, pro bono fellowship programs or direct hands-on assistance to the public, tomorrow's lawyers are being taught today about the importance of public service and are offered many opportunities to place that teaching into action by providing legal services to those needing them the most but least able to afford them.

The state's law schools have provided articles on how pro bono service is removed from the rhetoric and transformed into concrete action plans on their campuses.

Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center

Public Interest Job Fairs at LSU Law Center

By Annie LeBlanc

For the third year in a row, a representative of Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center's Career Services Office (CSO) and law students attended the annual Equal Justice Works Job Fair in Washington, D.C., this past October. Nine LSU students participated, each one securing multiple interviews with public interest and government employers. Many of the students commented on how inspiring it was to be with hundreds of other law students who feel passionate about the same areas that interest them.

Additionally this past fall, the CSO hosted its first Virtual Public Interest Job Fair. With the hope of exposing more students to public interest work, the CSO decided to bring employers to LSU in a

virtual format. Sixteen employers from Texas, Louisiana and Georgia agreed to participate and more than 20 law students applied for these jobs.

Often public interest employers do not have the budget or time to travel for recruiting. The virtual job fair prevented the need for travel and cost nothing for the employers. Students uploaded their résumés on the online job system eAttorney. The information was then mailed to the employers. In addition, students were allowed to record a short mock interview through the computer program InterviewStream. Employers were given access to the students' interviews. From the feedback received, these interviews were helpful to the employers and all employers intend to participate again next year. It added "life" to a student's résumé, according to one employer, and enabled a student to stand out from others.

Most of the employers cannot pay for these summer jobs, yet many students applied. Students are willing to forego pay when the work involves issues they are passionate about. Many students understand the need to use their legal edu-

cation to help others, and some carry this so far as to make it their main focus in law school.

LSU Public Interest Law Society

By John M. Church

In spring 2005, students at Louisiana State University prompted the Law Center to establish the LSU Public Interest Law Society (PILS), a student-run organization that facilitates and coordinates pro bono activities by LSU law students. One of PILS' missions is to provide opportunities for students to assist in providing legal services to the community.

PILS directly organizes and supervises student participation in several programs, including Thirst for Justice, a program started by Judge Melvin Shortess and the Baton Rouge Bar Association (BRBA) to help residents in blighted neighborhoods. Another PILS/BRBA collaborative project, the Social Security Assistance Program, allows students to serve as advocates at appeals from denials of disability benefits. Under the supervision of Eric Miller, the students file appeals, investigate and draft prehearing briefs, and argue at the hearings of the appeals.

A third project sends students to Renaissance Park, a FEMA trailer park housing people displaced by Hurricane Katrina, to assist with the Bar Association's Disaster Recovery Project. Under the supervision of Professor Elizabeth Murrill, the students help residents complete "Road Home" applications and assist with family law matters. PILS also has linked with the national Student Hurricane Network and will provide students and logistical support for Network projects in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast.

PILS also organizes opportunities for students to do nonlegal community service work, including post-Katrina reconstruction, Habitat for Humanity, the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room and the "Everybody Reads" literacy program.

The Law Center's Pro Bono Fellowship program provides fellowships to law students who spend their summers doing public interest work. Over the last two summers, the Law Center has funded 14 students who have worked at a variety of local and national public interest jobs. PILS assists with this program by helping identify and publicize opportunities for full-time public interest work and by reviewing student applications for summer fellowships.

In addition to these ongoing student-oriented initiatives, the Law Center provides space, logistical support and student workers for the Louisiana State Bar Association's Disaster Legal Hotline and its successor, the Louisiana Civil Justice Center. The Law Center also houses and supports the Pro Bono Legal Corps (PBLC), a collaborative project of the LSBA, the Louisiana Bar Foundation and Americorps. The PBLC employs two full-time attorneys, Susan Saba and Kathleen McNelis, who recruit, train and supervise students for a broad range of public interest projects and service providers.

Loyola University College of Law

By William P. Quigley

Loyola University College of Law makes service to the community a centerpiece of the educational mission. Every law student is required to provide 50 hours of *pro bono* service to the community, to participate in one of the many clinics and give service to the community, or to take the courses "Law and Poverty" or "Street Law" to learn how to be a people's lawyer.

The Loyola Law Clinic teaches students and serves people in the areas of family law, criminal defense, homeless advocacy, immigration and criminal prosecution. Post-Hurricane Katrina, the clinic has expanded to include a Workplace Justice Project and a Katrina Clinic.

The Loyola Workplace Justice Project assists workers in dealing with unscrupulous contractors, non-payment of wages, and other employment issues for low-wage workers.

The Katrina Clinic grew out of experiences with displaced people while the Loyola Law School was itself displaced to Houston. The Katrina Clinic now has two full-time staff attorneys and has worked with dozens of law students providing education and non-litigation advocacy to more than 1,000 people.

The Law Clinic also serves as an umbrella organization for the Extern Program and Street Law. The Extern Program places law students in local courts and agencies to assist in the provision of legal services. Street Law places law students in public and private schools in the community where they teach basic legal principles to high school

Annie LeBlanc, a 2002 graduate of Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center, now works at the Law Center as a career counselor, aiding law students in finding clerkships and permanent employment. Her focus as a career counselor is the public interest sector, and she serves as the career services advisor to the Public Interest Law Society at LSU. (LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center, Career Services Office, Ste. 101 Law Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-1000)



Professor John M. Church holds the Harry S. Redmon, Jr. Professorship at Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center. He has a master's degree from the University of Illinois and a law degree from the University of Colorado, where he was a Harno Fellow, the case note editor of the University of Colorado Law Review, and was inducted into the Order of the Coif. Prior to joining the Law Center faculty in 1991, he practiced law in Denver. (LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center, Career Services Office, Ste. 101 Law Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-1000)



William P. Quigley is the Janet Mary Riley Professor of Law, director of the Loyola Law Clinic and director of the Gillis W. Long Poverty Law Center at Loyola University College of Law. He teaches the courses "Law and Poverty," "Street Law" and "Law and Religion." He has published several books and law review articles dealing with human rights issues in the United States. (7214 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70118-3538)



John K. Pierre was promoted to interim vice chancellor of Southern University Law Center in 2006. He has been on the law faculty since 1990. He is a member of the Louisiana State and Texas bar associations and the Louisiana Certified Public Accountants Association. He received a bachelor's degree in accounting from Southern University in 1980, a master's degree in tax accounting from Texas Tech University in 1982 and his JD degree from Southern Methodist University School of Law in 1985. (Southern University Law Center, P.O. Box 9294, Baton Rouge, LA 70815)

students. This year Street Law was expanded beyond schools to a juvenile prison, a women's shelter and St. Michael's School.

The Gillis W. Long Poverty Law Center provides summer internship stipends in legal services and other pro bono settings for up to 24 Loyola students each summer.

The Gillis Long Center also provides loan forgiveness assistance to graduates doing full-time public service work. Recently, the Loyola Loan Forgiveness Program was allowed to expand due to a generous grant from the Kendall Vick Foundation.

Southern University Law Center

By John K. Pierre

The Southern University Law Center, with a student body of 488, is an institution of higher education that has long valued *pro bono* activities and community service by its student body. The Law Center's commitment to *pro bono* dates back to its founding 60 years ago. Early graduates of the Law Center, such as Jesse N. Stone, Johnnie Jones, Murphy Bell, Sr. and Revius Ortique, engaged in public interest litigation, legal services activities for poor and indigent clients, and *pro bono* legal services.

The Law Center operates several legal clinics and outreach programs providing *pro bono* legal services to Louisiana citizens. These programs allow students to provide *pro bono* and public interest legal services to indigent clients while gaining practical experience in the preparation of cases, the representation of clients, and the development of real-world, problem-solving skills. These programs are designed to allow third-year law students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom to practical live-client situations. The clinical education and outreach programs that have been operated by the Law Center and that have a direct effect on indigent clients in Louisiana include the Criminal Law Clinic, the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, the Domestic Violence Clinic, the Juvenile Law Clinic, the Administrative/Civil Law Clinic, the Elder Law Clinic and the Louisiana Agricultural Mediation Program.

During the 2005-06 academic year, the Law

Center's legal clinics and outreach programs provided legal services to low-income or indigent clients in more than 300 cases, controversies and disputes with administrative agencies. Because of the variety of legal clinics available to third-year law students, approximately 60 percent of these students participate in the programs.

In addition to students enrolled in legal clinics, several Law Center students have been involved with projects such as the Innocence Project, the Student Hurricane Network, and the Louisiana Bar Foundation project and the Americorps volunteer project providing legal assistance to victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Also, during income tax season, law students operate a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site at the Law Center to assist low-income taxpayers file their federal and state income tax returns.

Tulane Law School

By Julie H. Jackson

Twenty years ago, Tulane Law School (TLS) broke new ground by requiring all its students to give back to the community — to share with those in need of legal assistance the skills and knowledge they were acquiring in the classroom. In 1987, Tulane became the first law school in the nation to impose *pro bono* work as a graduation requirement. Since this beginning two decades ago, Tulane has continued to build upon the original concept. The essential premise of the program is the "trickle-up" theory of moral obligation: once law students recognize the overwhelming need of the underserved and experience the difference they can make by providing *pro bono* assistance, they are more likely to continue as members of the bar to give of their time and skills in the public interest. As a bonus, students can gain firsthand experience in addressing a variety of legal issues.

When the requirement was originally implemented, each student was required to contribute 20 *pro bono* hours prior to graduation. TLS has now increased the requirement to 30 hours per student to give each individual more time for training as well as to provide needed services. But, as the total number of hours contributed by the law students annually reveals, many students far exceed the minimum requirement. During 2006, the students reported nearly 9,000 hours of service

donated in the public interest across the nation.

Twenty years later, more ways than ever exist through which the students can give back to the community. There are no geographical limits; the students make contributions across the country. However, the majority of students choose to do *pro bono* work in the New Orleans metropolitan area. A sample of placements reveals the variety of legal topics encountered and the endless array of needs the students tackle.

- ▶ **Blighted Housing Hearings.** The City of New Orleans has recently begun hearings on blighted housing determinations. These hearings are expected to be a critical step in addressing the issue of blighted and abandoned houses that pose an almost insuperable obstacle in the city's renewal. Students conduct research, help locate property owners now scattered across the country, prepare notice for absentee owners, and assist with hardship determinations. City legal staff and volunteer lawyers from the local bar conduct the hearings and students provide assistance as needed.
- ▶ **Homeless Assistance.** Several placements address this underserved population which finds fewer resources available to them. The newest project provides assistance in obtaining Social Security benefits, in conjunction with H.E.L.P., a program founded by Federal District Judge Jay C. Zainey. Students also work with the Homeless Legal Advocacy Project of the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corp. (NOLAC).
- ▶ **Katrina Legal Assistance Program** at NOLAC. This new program co-sponsored by TLS addresses the most urgent needs of those recently returned to New Orleans and those trying to return. The immediate need during the fall has been successions. Lack of clear title to the house is a principal deterrent to receiving federal and state assistance, such as "Road Home" grants. Particularly in the Ninth Ward, houses have been handed down, generation to generation, without concern for legal formalities. Students are now assisting in handling the staggering caseload of non-contested succession cases: they conduct interviews with prospective clients, assist in filing petition and help clients obtain necessary documentation, including birth or death certificates, tax records, divorce filings, etc., and draft pleadings.
- ▶ **ELLA** (Entertainment Law Legal Assistance). Jointly sponsoring this program are TLS's Pro

Bono Program, the Arts Council of New Orleans and the New Orleans Music Office Co-Op. The purpose is to address unmet legal needs of artists and entertainers of modest means.

- ▶ **POPS** (Project for Older Prisoners). TLS founded this program in 1989 to serve as advocates for the often overlooked population of elderly or infirm inmates who no longer pose a threat to society. Students conduct interviews and assist eligible inmates in the parole process.
- ▶ **Public Defenders.** Law students assist public defenders in several parishes of southeastern Louisiana with initial client interviews, research/writing, assessment of cases, tracking defendants and obtaining records.

Critical to the Tulane Pro Bono Program are the contributions of private practitioners and legal services attorneys who supervise law students in this wide array of *pro bono* placements. *Pro bono* attorneys extend the reach of their donated hours by joining with Tulane law students in offering free legal assistance. Thanks to the supervision provided by these dedicated members of the bar in the past two decades, *pro bono* students at Tulane have been able to give even more back to the community.

Tulane Law School Clinical Program

Also on the public interest front, Tulane has a well-established clinical program through which student attorneys, supervised by clinical faculty, handle cases for those who could not otherwise afford an attorney. The law school offers clinical opportunities in the areas of criminal law, civil rights, domestic violence, juvenile law and environmental law. For example, the Civil Litigation Clinic allows students to earn credit by representing indigent clients primarily in federal court. Students handle fair housing matters, employment discrimination and sexual harassment cases, and section 1983 actions relating to police misconduct and other constitutional violations. The students handle all aspects of the litigation, from client interviewing and counseling, to discovery, motion practice and trial work. The experience is invaluable and life-changing for both students and clients.



Julie H. Jackson is assistant dean for public interest programs at Tulane Law School. She is responsible for the implementation and administration of the first mandatory pro bono program to be established by a law school in the United States. She also teaches a seminar in mediation. Prior to joining Tulane, she clerked for a federal judge in Los Angeles, Calif., and practiced labor and employment law with the firm of Smith, Currie & Hancock in Atlanta, Ga. She received her JD degree from Harvard Law School in 1980. Contributing to this article was Professor Stacy Seicshnaydre. (Tulane Law School, Ste. 216, 6329 Freret St., New Orleans, LA 70118-6321)