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ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Public Interest Service at the University of Colorado School of Law

by Norman Aaronson

The University of Colorado School of Law (Colorado Law) has embraced public interest and public service by teaching its students to view public service as part of their ethical obligation as future lawyers. Public interest and *pro bono* work are part of the professionalism Colorado Law hopes to instill in its students. Here are a few of the public interest and public service programs that Colorado Law sponsors.

Public Interest Task Force

Colorado Law has formed a Public Interest Task Force, whose purpose is to consider ways to advance public interest and access to justice for members of the community who are in need. Members of the Task Force include Professors Melissa Hart, Emily Calhoun, Ann England, and Norm Aaronson; Karen Trojanowski, Associate Director for Public Sector & Externships; and Colorado Law students and staff. The Task Force continues to explore ways to expand law student involvement in volunteer community legal service.

Public Interest Law Mentor Program

The Public Interest Law Mentor Program has been established at the law school for students who have expressed interest in public service or *pro bono* work. The program matches students with attorney mentors who perform public service or *pro bono* work. This year, every student who desired a mentor was matched with one. Third-year law student Sarah Quick-sall started the program with faculty assistance.

The Access to Justice column provides information about poverty law and other areas of the law as they relate to low-income clients; reports on the Access to Justice Commission and local and national Access to Justice Committees; and testimonials from lawyers about their pro bono experience. Readers interested in contributing an article on legal services, pro bono, and Access to Justice topics should contact Kathleen Schoen at kschoen@cobar.org.

Lend-a-Law Student Program

Colorado Law's volunteer Lend-a-Law Student program has been in existence for ten years. Norm Aaronson supervises the program, along with student coordinators Mark Loy (3L) and William D. Mitchell (3L). The program's fall organizational meeting was held on August 31, 2006.

This past academic year, seventy law students provided more than 3,000 hours of *pro bono* and public interest work for attorneys who were working on *pro bono* cases and for public interest agencies. The students also taught in classrooms in the public schools. The law students provided these services without course credit or pay.

On April 5, 2006, a recognition ceremony and reception was held to acknowledge the students' efforts. Colorado Supreme Court Justices Greg Hobbs and Alex Martinez and Court of Appeals Judge JoAnn Vogt spoke at this event. Constance Talmage, Executive Director of the Colorado Lawyers Committee, also was a featured speaker. To find out more about this program, contact Norm Aaronson at (303) 492-6602 or norman.aaronson@colorado.edu.

Loan Repayment Assistance Program

Colorado Law's Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) was established to assist graduates of the law school who choose law careers in public service or with not-for-profit

The Colorado Access to Justice Commission is an independent entity that was formed in 2003 with the support of the Colorado Supreme Court, the Colorado Bar Association, and the Statewide Legal Services Group. The Mission of the Access to Justice Commission is to develop, coordinate, and implement policy initiatives to expand access to and enhance the quality of justice in civil legal matters for persons who encounter barriers in gaining access to Colorado's civil justice system.

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organizations where they can use their legal skills to help communities in need. LRAP assists students entering a career in public interest law by paying back some of their school loan debt. Graduates who choose law-related careers in qualifying public service or with not-for-profit organizations following graduation may have their law school debt burden paid in part by the LRAP, provided their qualifying income is below the level appearing in the published qualifying income scale.

Colorado Law's program is unique because students have raised all of the funds in LRAP, either through class gifts, student donations, or student-organized fundraisers. Since the program's inception two years ago, four students have been awarded LRAP funds.

Colorado Law is strongly committed to LRAP, and it is important to note that LRAP funding is quite modest at this time. The school currently is engaged in fundraising efforts to increase the amount that can be awarded. On November 10, 2006, the Denver law firm of Davis Graham and Stubbs hosted the annual LRAP fundraising event. Colorado Senator Ken Salazar spoke at the event. Approximately \$1,200 was raised for Colorado Law's LRAP.

The gap between law school tuition and beginning salaries in the public interest sector continues to increase in Colorado and throughout the country. Consequently, the need grows incrementally for loan repayment assistance and programs such as Colorado Law's LRAP. Public donations to the program are always welcomed. For complete information about Colorado Law's LRAP, please contact Julie Levine at (303) 735-6196 or julie.levine@cufund.org.

Public Interest Student Association

Colorado Law's Public Interest Student Association (PISA) organized Public Interest Week, which took place October 23-27, 2006. Panels and presentations by attorneys in the public sector were the highlights of the week. The panels provided information for students on government, non-profit, and public interest law. Participants in Public Interest Week included representatives from the Boulder County AIDS Project, Boulder County Legal Services, Western Resource Advocates, the Restorative Justice Program, the Colorado State Public Defender's Office, and the Office of the Child's Representative. An open forum of the Public Interest Task Force also was held. Public Interest Week concluded with a lunch for public interest mentors and mentees who participated in the Public Interest Law Mentor Program (PILMP).

Public Interest Week and the PILMP are both in the planning stages for the 2007-08 school year. PISA is seeking volunteers from government, public interest, and non-profit organizations to participate as panelists and serve as public interest mentors. For information about participating in either program, please contact PISA president Erin Gilmer at erin.gilmer@colorado.edu or PISA vice-president Meghan Barnds at meghan.barnds@colorado.edu.

Office of Career Development

The Office of Career Development (OCD) at Colorado Law is focusing on public interest under the leadership of Associate Director Karen Trojanowski. Ms. Trojanowski focuses primarily

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ly on helping students and alumni find legal opportunities in the public sector, which includes government and public interest. The OCD recently began to administrate the externship program, with the hope of creating more public interest opportunities for students.

Trojanowski attended the Equal Justice Works Conference, which was held in Washington, D.C., on October 18–20, 2006. More than 130 government and public interest employers were in attendance at the conference. Trojanowski met with employers on behalf of Colorado Law students to identify additional career opportunities for Colorado Law students.

Several years ago, the OCD created a *Public Interest Directory*. The 2006–07 edition is complete and contains a selection of available public interest internship and volunteer opportunities in Colorado. The directory is maintained on the OCD's password-protected online system and is available to all Colorado Law students, alumni, faculty, and staff. For a copy of the directory, or to be included in the directory, please contact Karen Trojanowski at (303) 492-5911 or karent@colorado.edu.

Career Symposium

Colorado Law and the University of Denver (DU) Sturm College of Law are co-sponsoring and co-hosting a Public Interest

and Government Career Symposium on February 9, 2007. The Career Symposium will be held in Boulder in the new Wolf Law Building. This event will provide an excellent forum for representatives of government agencies, public interest organizations, and the judiciary to meet students and graduates from both Colorado law schools.

Employers in attendance will be able to meet and interview law students and graduates who want to pursue internships or start their careers in public interest and government service. Employer registration for the Career Symposium is free and currently is being accepted from government agencies, public interest and non-profit organizations, and the judiciary. Please visit the website at <http://www.colorado.edu/law/careerservices> and click on the registration link, or contact Karen Trojanowski.

Conclusion

Colorado Law strives to build on its programs and increase opportunities for its law students to engage in public interest and *pro bono* work. Input, suggestions, and support from lawyers in Colorado are welcomed and encouraged. Contact Karen Trojanowski for complete information about public interest and public service programs at Colorado Law. ■



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