



Dean's Column

PROMOTING PRO BONO FROM THE START

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From the beginning, the William S. Boyd School of Law has been committed to helping students develop as professionals, who are aware of and committed to fulfilling their obligation to provide pro bono service. Since its founding, the Boyd School of Law has emphasized that the privilege of studying the law and becoming a lawyer goes hand in hand with a commitment to increase access to legal services among the underserved. Throughout their time at the law school, Boyd students are encouraged and often required to participate in pro bono programs that provide opportunities to serve and educate the public. Because October is designated as a month for honoring pro bono service and reminding the profession of its responsibilities, this month's column highlights some of the contributions made by Boyd students, from the time they begin their studies through graduation.

Before classes begin, first year students take an oath of professionalism. Administered this year by Nevada Supreme Court Chief Justice Douglas and Justice Pickering, the oath both acknowledges the responsibilities assumed by members of the legal profession and commits Boyd's students to begin fulfilling those obligations immediately.

During their first year, students participate in a mandatory pro bono experience. The Community Legal Education Program is jointly sponsored by the Law School, Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Legal Services. Each week, free classes are offered to the public on topics including bankruptcy, divorce, foreclosure mediation, guardianship, paternity/custody, small claims and mediation. Students both teach these classes and contribute to the preparation of supporting materials (brochures and videos) that are posted on the law school's website. Several of the manuals are published in English and Spanish; Chinese, Korean, Thai and Vietnamese versions of the divorce brochure are also available online. Students are carefully supervised by attorney members of the Nevada bar.

By contributing to community legal education classes, students begin to recognize the differing perspectives members of the public have regarding the legal system and its representatives. They also learn to differentiate providing legal advice from providing information about the law and available community resources to the public. Nearly 40,000 members of the community have attended these free legal education classes and all of our law students

have their first experience working with "real people" during their first year of law school.

After the student's first year, pro bono opportunities abound. Through the Partners in Pro Bono Program, students are paired with local attorneys who have accepted pro bono cases identified by the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada. Students become involved in all of the many stages and tasks involved in representation: from interviewing clients to drafting documents, researching relevant law and potentially even accompanying the attorney to court. Students participating in the Partners in Pro Bono Program benefit from working with attorneys in private practice, committed to public service and to mentoring students. The research, drafting and administrative support provided by students facilitates the attorney's pro bono contributions and enables the representation of even more clients.

The students themselves have created other public service opportunities. Since 2009, the Minority Law Students Association, working with faculty and administrators at the law school, has reached out to local high school students through the Street Law Program. Law student volunteers travel to local high schools and speak to largely-at-risk high school students about such diverse topics as rights at arrest, credit card obligations and housing laws. In turn, high school students visit and tour the law school and take on the role of attorneys in mock trials coordinated by law students, who also act as judges.

The Public Interest Law Association, a student organization that raises awareness of public service opportunities and encourages student participation in programs that increase access to legal services among underserved and indigent populations provide financial support for students who choose to commit to summer public service employment in lieu of private firm clerkships. PILA grants, totaling more than \$100,000, have enabled students to commit to public service work – almost always in Nevada – over the summer.

By the time Boyd students graduate, they will have contributed to outreach programs designed to inform consumers of their rights and obligations, worked directly with members of the bar to support representation of those who could not otherwise afford lawyers and supported colleagues who choose to undertake public interest work full-time. Students graduate from Boyd with both an understanding of what their professional responsibilities entail and concrete, practical experience of the programs that fulfill those responsibilities. ■