

Yesterday & Today Tomorrow

News and information about the University of South Carolina School of Law Pro Bono Program

Student Voice

Through a vast variety of exciting initiatives and a constantly changing menu of opportunities, law students are being exposed to an environment that fosters the ethic of service through the USC School of Law Pro Bono Program. The Program offers law students the quintessential element of any educational institution: opportunity. Although most of the opportunities are law-related, the Program sponsors less demanding programs as well, offering every law student the chance to volunteer on whatever level she is able. This array of volunteer opportunities serves as a development vehicle where a student can develop and enhance invaluable skills that will carry on into her career as an attorney, while providing a valuable public service. As a result, the Pro Bono Program is graduating law students who are better to serve their clients as counselors, advocates, and negotiators.

Fortunately, I, too, will be better equipped to serve my clients after having participated in the Program. Whether resulting from nature or nurture, my inclination, like that of many other law students, has always been to help those in need. Experiences like Salkehatchie seemed more like therapy than work. When I entered law school, I found inspiration—amidst the fear, bewilderment, panic, and rare confidence which permeate one's first year of law school—in the Pro Bono Program. (I feel compelled to include that for the record I also found inspiration in the classroom.) I became acquainted with the Program through the Best in Class Food Drive, a school-wide food drive held each semester to benefit Harvest Hope Food Bank. My limited participation in the food drive during my 1L year exposed me to the Pro Bono Program and an incredible selection of service opportunities. Of particular importance to me is my experience as a mediator in Attendance Improvement Mediation Program (AIM). As a mediator in AIM, I play an active role in forging relationships between parents and school representative and in underscoring the fact that education sets the guideposts for every child's future. My experiences in the Pro Bono Program have been enlightening, educational, and therapeutic. The education I have received simply from developing, exercising, and fine-tuning legal skills is priceless.

Perhaps the most important point that the Pro Bono Program has reaffirmed for me is that practicing law is about people. As law students, we are training to enter a profession which prides itself on ethics and morals and which above all else serves people. However, the difference between serving one's clients and serving one's community is substantial. A law school graduate, simply by having her J.D., can expect her income to be in the top 10% for South Carolina. Although at times it may seem untrue, graduates from the University of South Carolina School of Law are in a very fortunate position. Thanks to the Pro Bono Program, these graduates recognize their good fortune, and they understand the impact that a service-oriented lawyer has on a community. For seventeen years the USC School of Law Pro Bono Program, with unparalleled support from the administration, faculty, and students, has been graduating law students with the desire to help the unrepresented and the skills to improve their communities. With the continued support from the law school community, the Program will continue to make a difference for the public good.

Ben Bruner
Pro Bono Board President

First

Welcome to the first of what we hope will be many newsletters from the Pro Bono Program. Our goal is to offer this periodic update by email. This way we can highlight timely projects and keep in touch more frequently. To do this we need for you to send your email address to Pam Robinson, robinson@law.sc.edu. The University has a system for safely distributing email messages to persons who have agreed to accept them. We don't want to fill your inbox with junk but we do want to stay in touch. And staying in touch is what this is all about!

Another first! When we started on this wonderful voyage over 16 years ago, there were no real program models to follow so we moved in to uncharted territory. Times have changed. The ABA now requires every accredited law school to offer substantial pro bono opportunities to their students. We were there in the beginning and the USC School of Law Pro Bono Program has now been recognized as the FIRST voluntary pro bono program in the US! How cool is that?

Project Updates and News

Do you speak Spanish and do you want to help the Hispanic community? Four years ago that simple request started a wonderful voyage for the Pro Bono Program. Students lined up to help with interpreting, income tax assistance, document translations, tutoring, providing information and access to services and even preparation for the citizenship exam. As a result of this interest Project Ayuda: Law Students Helping the Hispanic Community was born. A funny thing happened to Susan Chang on her way to law school! She was visiting the USC building on a Sat. and found the auditorium filled with Hispanic families. The Pro Bono Program was holding a special tax assistance project with Catholic Charities- Office of Immigration Services. Being of Hispanic descent, Susan knew that a school that valued this culture was important to her. She moved from RI and is now the Vice President of the Pro Bono Board and active with Project Ayuda. The stars and the moon were lined up for us that day!

17 years ago one of our first partners was the Richland County Guardian ad Litem Program (now called the Richland County CASA Program) They are still our partners! In January, training for new guardians ad litem was held at the Law School with amazing results. Over 20 law students became new volunteer advocates for abused and neglected children. We plan to continue to bring the training to the volunteers. Being a GAL is still an intense volunteer opportunity but many have found the skills and knowledge to be extremely valuable especially when they graduate.

Food Drives & Awards

Twice a year the Law School hums and buzzes! It must be time for the “Best Class Food Drive” Incentives, dares and old fashion challenges are tossed around and each day the bags of rice and boxes of cans pile up in the office. In 2004 we reached a huge milestone- 100,000 pounds of food for Harvest Hope Food Bank in 10 years. Since 2005 we have already donated over 65,000 pounds. You can see the opportunity to win the right to have the giant paper crown over your classes’ mailboxes is quite the incentive!

HHFB has honored the Pro Bono Program with numerous awards over the years. At their 25th Anniversary celebration we were recognized with the *Phenomenal Food Drive Award!!*

Check out the photos on the Pro Bono Web page at: www.sc.law.edu/probono

“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit”

Harry S Truman

How Can You help?

Does your firm or organization have a pro bono policy, written or just understood? Have you shared that with students? Have you stepped up and helped develop such a policy?

Are you in a position to hire new associates? Do you ask about an applicants pro bono commitment in the interview? Why not? The ABA has an excellent publication to help students confront this issue when they interview for jobs. Take a look at *The Path to Pro Bono: An Interviewing Tool for Law Students* at: www.abanet.org/legalservices/downloads/probono/path.pdf

We are sure you have received requests for donations to the USC School of Law! But have you considered directing your contribution to be used for the Pro Bono Program, the Public Interest Law Society Summer Internship program, the Public Interest Law Loan Forgiveness Fund or a scholarship with pro bono commitment as a criteria? You can do that!!

From the desk of...

“Some things never change” is often my response when I run into a long lost alumni! Yes, I am still the Director of the Pro Bono Program but most importantly I still enjoy working with students. There have been changes to the Program but the basic goals and values have stayed the same.

We have not always sung our praises but instead we have chosen to do good work, continue to support our community and try our best to make a difference. Judging from my knowledge of what alumni of the Program are doing and my first hand experience with students, I know we are making a difference.

I am often asked “how many hours do your students do” My answer is always “more than you can count”! It has never been the goal of the Pro Bono Program to amass numbers of hours but instead to accomplish deeds. It comes down to comparing apples to onions! Are the hours contributed by a volunteer guardian ad litem any more or less valuable than those spent advocating for an elderly patient in a nursing home? They are all valuable, they are all from the heart and they are all important to the recipient and to the volunteer but they are still just hours. The good deed is what is most important. Just like lawyers we ask our students to set a personal aspirational goal of 50 hours a year.

As I assembled the database for this first newsletter I was amazed to discover how scattered our former Board members and Award recipients are. You not only live and work all over the country but the variety in the types of jobs you have is awesome. I had great memories as I typed in your names and look forward to hearing from all of you. My hope is that we will use this newsletter to spread the word about the good work everyone is doing and staying in touch. We want to continue to “make a difference”!

Pam Robinson

Next

Send us your news! Where are you working? Any special projects? What your are doing in your community? We would not ask if we didn’t want to know!

Now that you have been out in the real world anywhere from 1-17 years, do you have words of wisdom for presently enrolled students? Pass on this knowledge!

What can we do for you? Do you have a pro bono project that needs some help? research? Call and let us know- we love to connect alumni with students- especially those who know the meaning of pro bono.

Would you like a copy of this newsletter in an electronic format that you can send to colleagues, friends and family? No problem, just send Pam a message and it will be on its way to you.

Most importantly send your email address to Robinson@law.sc.edu and future newsletters will arrive electronically.