Once again, the Public Interest & Pro Bono Program saw a significant increase in the number of pro bono hours logged by our graduating students. Last year, we had what was then a record 144 students who volunteered 25,822.1 pro bono hours, which represented almost four times the number of hours when the program began to ramp up in 2011. This year, despite a smaller than usual graduating class, 135 students logged 35,875.89 hours (an increase of 39%) and that includes only those who reported hours because they were seeking pro bono recognition. Moreover, in contrast to some law schools, we count only pure pro bono time: we exclude all clinics, outside placements, and paid work for non-profits. Our percentage increases may not continue at this rate, but we hope to continue to set new records each year as we bring on more opportunities for more students, earlier in their time at GW. Photos from the picnic and Nationals’ baseball game at which we honored the students and their families the before graduation can be found at http://scavonephotography.zenfolio.com/p881331544.

As in the past, my work as associate dean can be roughly divided into three parts: (1) special programs; (2) assisting students locate public interest and public service jobs and working to make it financially possible to take those positions; and (3) providing meaningful opportunities for students to do pro bono work and supporting students who wish to do it. On the job side, the Career Center, generally, and Tamara Devieux-Adams in particular, do most of the day to day work; on the pro bono front, David Johnson, the assistant dean for pro bono, is responsible for so much of what we do.
Public Interest & Pro Bono Pre-Orientation and Other Special Programs

As it has done for the previous four years, the 2014-15 public interest program began with 90 incoming students arriving three days early for a voluntary Public Interest & Pro Bono Pre-Orientation program that is unique to GW. All students had an opportunity to go to Superior Court – our local trial court - first to hear from judges and law clerks, and then to visit the various courtrooms where proceedings were taking place, including criminal, civil, landlord-tenant, family law, and small claims. They also met with administrative law judges to learn about the many different kinds of issues that are handled in the District in proceedings outside the regular court system. This year everyone was able to meet with representatives of the D.C. City Council (to learn about our bizarre system of government and our relations with Congress). Small groups also went to the City morgue, a medical marijuana dispensary, and an adult and a youth detention facility. This year we also arranged for a meeting with the Human Rights Campaign where students learned about the increasingly important and quite complex world in which clients of lawyers are transitioning their public gender identifications.

On the third day we had community service work painting benches on the Mall. Among the events on all three days, we also provided opportunities to discuss with group leaders what the students had seen and how it would fit in with what they would be studying starting the following week. The overall program also included one session designed to expose students to ethical choices that lawyers will face no matter what kind of work they do and a presentation by the author Karen Houppert about her book, *Chasing Gideon*, and the failure of our justice system to assure adequate defense counsel in criminal cases. The three days also provided for a bonding experience for students with similar interests, as well as the chance to meet faculty and
administrators on an informal basis and interact with upper-class students who led some of the groups. Photos from the community service day can be found at http://smu.gs/1tBD1JV.

The public interest program has two other special programs during the year that give the students unique learning and service opportunities. The first is called the Gulf Recovery Program, which was started in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, but has now morphed into a week long effort in which 30 students are exposed to the special problems of obtaining access to justice there, assist a variety of legal service organizations, and perform other types of community service. The other is Alternative Spring Break, in which for the last two years, a dozen students have gone to Tucson, Arizona, where they have explored the related problems of border control and immigrants seeking legitimate entry into this country. The program also included a cross-border trip, meetings with government officials, and working with legal services providers and others. A student blog with some photos from the trip can be found at: http://www.gwlawila.org/#!alt-spring-break/c1ylq.

**Jobs**

It is no secret that there are fewer law jobs now as compared to six years ago, but public interest jobs do not seem to have been hit as hard as other areas, perhaps because they were not plentiful to start. Government jobs are holding steady and in the last two years, our graduates were able to secure at least 115 jobs with the federal government, plus many others from state and local governments, not to mention judicial clerkships. Moreover, our students are in a better position than many, not only because being in Washington makes it easier to learn about job openings and move quickly, but also because our Field Placement Program provides 500 opportunities per year for students to gain real world experience, for academic credit, in government and non-profit jobs. What is even more significant is that doing a good job while on
Field Placement is the best way to land a permanent position there, or at some other place else where a satisfied supervisor is happy to recommend a student.

There are three aspects to the jobs function: (a) informing students about public interest or public service jobs and why they are worth pursuing; (b) making specific information about specific jobs readily available; and (c) assisting in financing those opportunities and advising students about recent federal laws that make accepting such positions after graduation much more financially feasible.

Much of the information dissemination work is done by Tamara and others in the Career Center, with David expanding the annual Pro Bono Fair and sponsoring other activities during National Pro Bono Week. This year, I addressed each of the six Inns of Court in a special session on alternative jobs and why they are worth considering. We have also arranged to bring in speakers to broaden student horizons on the world of public interest law and assist students seeking post-graduate public interest fellowships. For the past four years I have chosen five incoming students who receive the designation Public Interest Scholar, which mainly means that I am their faculty mentor and provide them additional guidance in following public interest careers, plus a Supreme Court trip to hear oral arguments without having to stand in line. The five students also receive $4000 for a summer public interest job after their first year.

On the financing side, the new federal loan repayment and loan forgiveness programs are a major help to students who wish to take lower paying jobs, with governments, non-profits, or even law firms that serve middle income clients. Recent amendments have made the program even more attractive. The basics are described at:

http://www.law.gwu.edu/Academics/Publicinterest/Documents/MAKING%20PUBLIC%20INTEREST%20AFFORDABLE%20Rev%20Feb%202013[1].pdf

A small item in President
Obama’s 2015 budget request that would cap graduate student loans at $58,000, gave us a scare. The proposal turned out not to have much legs, but the issue of capping student loans will not go away. We have been in touch with officials at the Department of Education about the issue and will also be working with ABA staff and others who are reviewing various proposals. This is a subject on which not all law schools – and not even all those in our peer group – have the same positions, and so we will need to keep a close eye on what is being proposed.

In late June we finalized a new program – the Innovation and Internet Advocacy Initiative – which is being funded in large part by $1 million grant over five years from an anonymous donor. It has three components, all designed to develop a new generation of public interest advocates, initially in the field of telecommunications. One part will be an advocacy training course taught by experienced advocates, focusing on current issues in the telecom field. Several students from that course will do externships during the spring semester at Public Knowledge, a telecom advocacy group for listeners and users of telecom services. The grant will also pay for four students for each of the next four summers for jobs at Public Knowledge. Finally, the grant will also enable us to have two GW Law post-graduate fellows for each of the next three years, who will have two years of paid advocacy training and experience at Public Knowledge as a start to their careers. We will be seeking additional contributions and looking to branch out into other similar advocacy areas.

Pro Bono

In a world in which there are so many individuals in need of legal services, it should not be difficult to find ways for law students to bridge some of that gap. But it is not easy. Most existing organizations are not set up to take in volunteers for a variety of reasons, some understandable – no space and lack of a specific commitment of significant time – and others
less so (it means changing the way things have always been done). Then there is the concern, largely over-stated, that the law students might be providing assistance in a way that could be construed as giving legal advice. As a result, while some of our students volunteer at existing organizations (mainly doing intake work), we have built our pro bono program on new ideas and new approaches, as the projects discussed below illustrate.

There are three other ingredients, at least two of which are essential for every successful pro bono project: a committed partner organization, enthusiastic students, and well-thought out logistics. The best ideas for projects will go nowhere unless there are willing partners and students who want to carry the ball and bring along others who are not ready for leadership roles. In some cases, such as the domestic violence assistance project, the idea came from a student, and our role was to make it happen by opening doors and solving problems. In others, such as the cancer project, the idea came from outside the law school, but whatever the source, the idea can bear fruit only if there is a student who sees that it actually gets done and we can solve the logistics problems. On the logistics side, the surest way to kill a project is to have either students or the people they are going to serve sit around without the other essential component.

Perhaps our most successful and innovative project involves the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project (MAIP), which is a separate organization that is now here at GW under a unique arrangement that may become a model for working closely with other non-profit groups. For several years our students had been volunteering to assist MAIP in screening cases in which a convicted inmate seeks to establish his innocence, in order to decide whether MAIP should investigate it further. That part of our work continues with three rounds of about twenty students each working under the supervision of two volunteer attorneys, Jay Hulme of Arent Fox, and Peter Kolker of Zuckerman, Spaeder. In addition, two years ago, we created a special
partnership under which GW provides office space, some equipment, and a modest payment, in exchange for which MAIP agreed to bring in up to ten students each semester as part of our outside placement program. The novel aspect of this project is that it assures us of ten spaces at one organization, close to the law school, with which we have a special working relationship. The students enroll under the field placement program, although in some ways their experience is similar to that in some clinics. The major advantage for the law school is flexibility: the attorneys who supervise the student placements are MAIP, not GW employees, and our agreement with MAIP is for three years, although both sides expect it to continue after the first term expires in July 2016. One indication of the popularity of working at MAIP is that this year’s graduating class alone recorded 842 volunteer hours, which does not include externships for which they received course credit.

Here are descriptions of some of other projects that we have underway:

- This was the second year for our project in the Family Law Division of the Superior Court working in its Self-Help Center. The issues that come to the Center involve far more complicated questions than how to fill out the initial complaint. Indeed, many people who do not have lawyers are referred by the judge who is handling the case to the Center, which is staffed by experienced paralegals, supplemented by volunteer family law practitioners. Caroline Rogus, a lawyer with domestic relations experience who had been a fellow with our clinics, has completed her second year and will be with us again next year to supervise our students. After a group training session, the students work in pairs on a regular schedule at the Self-Help Center where they provide information and other assistance to the unrepresented parties. The students either are taking or have taken family law, and this provides them with a great opportunity to combine classroom and
practical learning. This year we were able to have some of the students assist Caroline in mediations in family law cases, and we have received permission to expand our work to provide assistance in paternity and child support cases to defendants (mainly fathers) who have no understanding of the process and often cannot afford to pay the money that they may owe.

- In one sense the Self-Help Center project grew out of another project in the Domestic Violence Division. Through the persistence of a second year student who worked in domestic violence during the summer of 2010 in New York, we established a relationship with the head of the domestic violence intake unit at the Superior Court, who understands that his job is to help as many people as possible and who appreciates how law students can advance that goal. Our students assist individuals who are involved in domestic violence matters to understand what is required and help them prepare their papers, but not represent them in court. Because it is often unclear who the true aggressor is, and because another group only helps women who are petitioners, our students assist any party who asks, so long as we have not helped the other party. Our regular schedule has increased the use of these services, and we have received nothing but good news from both court personnel and the judges who hear these cases.

- In the District of Columbia, many disputes, both with the District Government and among private parties, are decided through administrative courts, which are centralized in the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). OAH has a lawyer whose job is to help the many individuals who have matters before OAH work their way through the process. This pro bono project utilizes more students than any other project, offering front line help to individuals who either want to bring a case or are a defendant. During
the academic year, we supply law students five days a week for most of the day, with somewhat smaller numbers during the summer and during vacations. This work provides students with a significant insight into the administrative process and also makes it possible for many people to be more effective in representing themselves.

- This year our students joined a significant new project at the federal bankruptcy court in Washington that helps individuals file their own bankruptcy petitions. Lawyers who are either bankruptcy practitioners or who receive training in the basics of individual bankruptcies serve as volunteers, and our students assist them, thereby increasing the number of individuals who can be helped. The lawyer who runs the program, GW Law alum Jeff Sherman, provides training for our students and then supervises them as they assist pro se filers. The program is open to students who either are taking or have taken one of the bankruptcy courses, and so, like the Self-Help program at the Family Law Division, our students learn practical skills, integrate them in the courses they are taking, and have something extra on their resumes when they seek a job.

- In 2012, at the request of the cancer center at the GW Hospital, we began providing assistance to patients who have legal as well as medical needs, in areas such as wills and advance directives, employment, social security disability payments, and medical insurance. In recent years, as a result of a changeover in leadership on the medical side, the essential ingredient of an enthusiastic partner has been lost, which slowed us down and made it harder to forge new areas. In addition, two of the lawyers who were available to provide backup services for more complex health insurance matters are no able to assist us. We believe that this program has great potential, and so we will continue to try to find partners at the Hospital to rejuvenate the program, principally by
disseminating information about it more widely and making better use of the staff at the cancer center.

- We are continuing our work with the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless to provide law student assistance to their lawyer volunteers who staff their intake programs, in order to expand the number of people who can be served. Every semester we supply ten students, which is the maximum number that the program can use.

- We have continued a modest project with a large patent firm here in DC that has been providing assistance on a pro bono basis to veterans who have been denied disability benefits and are appealing those decisions. Our students work with firm lawyers to write the briefs on appeal for veterans who would otherwise be unrepresented. In addition, after several unsuccessful attempts to find a way to partner with veterans groups, we have found a veterans’ group that coordinated five of our students helping attorneys who are representing veterans in appeals to the Court of Veterans Appeal.

- We are also participating in a regular program with the DC Public Defender Service to assist eligible individuals to obtain expungements of certain criminal convictions. And this year, after a few false starts, with the leadership of a third year student who would not take no for an answer, we re-invigorated the VITA program that provides assistance in the preparation of federal and local income taxes, starting with assistance to University staff and students, and hopefully expanding it next year.
Conclusion

The Public Interest & Pro Bono Program has made considerable strides in the past six years, but there is a long way to go in providing more opportunities for our students and in augmenting services to our community. We look forward to continuing to explore new ways to achieve our goals and to make George Washington known as the “public interest law school.”

Alan B. Morrison