For the first time since we began counting, the Public Interest & Pro Bono Program did not set a new school record for pro bono. 235 students in the Class of 2018 contributed 95,406.64 pro bono hours, an average of about 405 hours per student. This is the second highest student involvement, as well as the second highest hours total for a graduating class in our recorded history – with 97 fewer graduates than in the record year. To put that average in perspective, New York requires only 50 hours of pro bono work for admission, and it counts hours for which the student receives academic credit and paid work for non-profits, which we do not. We hope to continue to record pro bono hours in this range for the future, as we try to bring on more opportunities for more students, earlier in their time at GW. Photos from the reception at which we honored the students can be found at:

https://gwlaw.smugmug.com/Other/Projects/Miscellaneous/2018-Pro-Bono-Recognition-Ceremony-Highlights/n-WkRX55.

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, Lauren Seffel and Matt Orlins do most of the day to day work, and on the pro bono front, David Johnson, the assistant dean for pro bono, is responsible for much of what we do.
Public Interest & Pro Bono Pre-Orientation and Other Special Programs

As it has done for the previous seven years, the 2017-18 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, 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 Council of the District of Columbia (to learn about our bizarre system of government and our relations with Congress). We also met with an alumni judge at the DC Court of Appeals. Small groups also went to a medical marijuana dispensary, the probation office, an adult detention facility, and/or met with a county prosecutor. We also arranged for sessions 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 at Rawlins Park. The three days - concluding with a game at National Park - 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 the groups. Here is the group
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 in New Orleans – group photo below. As part of the experience, the students assist a variety of legal service organizations and perform other types of community service. One of the highlight events of the trip for many is the opportunity to meet with Federal District Judge Mary Ann Lemmon, who always invites a guest who is involved in an important aspect of the justice system in New Orleans.
The other major public interest event outside of Washington is the immigration related alternative spring break, in which up to a dozen students or have gone to either Tucson, Arizona or El Paso, Texas (this year), where they explore the related problems of border control and immigrants seeking legitimate entry into this country. The program also includes a cross-border trip, meetings with government officials, and working with legal services providers and others. Here is a further description of this year’s trip and some photos:  https://www.law.gwu.edu/gw-law-immigration-law-association-participates-border-immersion-program.

During Spring Break, the four major local law schools joined forces to offer Alternative Spring Break opportunities for their students. If each school recruited a few opportunities, there were that many more to be shared by all the students. David Johnson took the lead for GW.
This year, a combination of full and part-time opportunities were available at the following eight providers: DC Law Students in Court (Barring Notice Litigation Project and/or Expungement Project), Neighborhood Legal Services Program (Evaluation Project for Legal Clinics & Criminal Record Sealing Motions, Housing Unit and/or Intake/Brief Services Unit), Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program, Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project, Hogar Immigrant Services, Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights (CAIR) Coalition - Detention Line, and/or the DC Bar Pro Bono Center - Small Business Brief Advice Legal Clinics.

For several years, students published on line what was called the Public Interest Law Forum, which has been renamed the Public Interest Law Brief. Articles are generally around 3000 words, although shorter pieces are encouraged. There are no set list of topics and so can be on any issue of public policy with a law related aspect. There are many fewer footnotes in most articles, and style questions are largely left to the authors. A small student board selects and edits the articles, all of which I read for purposes of overall quality control and in a few instances to make big picture suggestions for changes. This year’s issues can be found at


Jobs

It is no secret that there are fewer law jobs now as compared to ten 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 were holding steady until the Trump hiring freeze, which has now eased somewhat. In the end, about 22% of our most recent graduating class had federal, state, or local government, or non-profit jobs, not including judicial clerkships. Moreover, our students are in a better position than many, not only because being in Washington makes it easier to learn about openings and move quickly, but also because over 500 students annually
participate in externships through the Field Placement Program, in which they gain real world experience, for academic credit, in government and non-profit jobs.

https://www.law.gwu.edu/field-placement. What is even more significant is that, doing a good job at a 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 other 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 federal laws that make accepting such positions after graduation much more financially feasible.

Much of the information dissemination work is done by the Career Center, by David who runs the annual Pro Bono Fair, and by sponsoring other activities during National Pro Bono Week. I once again 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. I have also obtained the rights to a book I co-edited, “Beyond the Big Firm: Profiles of Lawyers Who Want to Do Something More,” and we make electronic copies of the book available to all interested students.

For the past seven years I have chosen five incoming students who receive the designation Public Interest Scholar, which mainly means that I am their faculty mentor and I 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.

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On the financing side, the 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. The basics are described at: [https://gwlawdean.wordpress.com/2010/10/13/making-public-interest-affordable/](https://gwlawdean.wordpress.com/2010/10/13/making-public-interest-affordable/). Over the years there have been various efforts to reduce or eliminate the program, and the Trump budget contains some serious threats to the program on which we and others will keep an eye.

In June of 2015 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 is an advocacy training course taught by experienced lawyers, focusing on current issues in the telecom field. Several students from that course are now in externships during the summer at Public Knowledge, a telecom advocacy group for listeners and users of telecom services. The grant will pay a $4000 stipend for four students for a total of five summers for jobs at Public Knowledge. Finally, the grant enables us to have two GW Law post-graduate fellows, chosen in three cycles, who will have two years of paid advocacy training and experience at Public Knowledge as a start to their careers. The program also sponsored a major one day conference on the legal issues surrounding the efforts to bring driverless cars to a reality, and the program, including a full video, is available at [https://www.law.gwu.edu/driverless-cars-legal-landscape](https://www.law.gwu.edu/driverless-cars-legal-landscape). That conference has stimulated several follow on events, including testimony before Congress, a presentation at a committee of the National Academy of Sciences, and a program at the annual meeting of the American Law Institute.
Since I arrived at GW, my long term goal has been to provide funding so that every student would be guaranteed $4000 for a summer job in a non-profit organization or a government agency. We have a very modest program now that, together with the funding from the student run Equal Justice Foundation, provides for stipends or tuition remissions for about 80 students a year. In the past two years I brought in from a generous alum and his law firm grants of $4000 summer stipends for five students per year for five years at the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project (MAIP), which is housed here at GW. Its work is discussed below. Last year we added similar grants for up to three students to work on the protection of First Amendment rights, and this year, working with our development office, secured a half million dollar grant to endow six or more summer fellowships.

**Pro Bono**

In a city 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 original 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 who can help solve any logistics problems. On the logistics side, the surest way to kill a project is to have either students or the individuals they are hoping 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 could become a model for working closely with other non-profit groups. For eight 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 case screenings under the supervision of two volunteer attorneys, Jay Hulme of Arent Fox, and Peter Kolker of Zuckerman, Spaeder. After students prepare their memos, we meet as a group (I can’t resist being part of the discussion) to recommend which cases MAIP should accept. This year we had 64 student-screeners (some of whom volunteered more than once).

In addition, five 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 and in the summer as part of our outside placement program. The novel aspect of this project is that it assures us of a large contingent of placements 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 original agreement with MAIP was for a three year term, which we have just renewed. One indication of the popularity of working at MAIP is that this year’s graduating class alone recorded 2,928 volunteer hours (more than last year’s class), which does not include the externship hours for which they received course credit.

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

- This was the fifth 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. Most users of the Center are those without lawyers who are referred by the judge who is handling the case. The Center 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 fifth 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. Most of the students either are taking or have taken family law, and this provides them with a great opportunity to combine classroom and practical learning. We have also been able to have some of the students assist Caroline in mediations in family law cases, and we hope to expand our work to provide assistance in paternity and child support cases to litigants (mainly fathers) many
of whom have little 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. For several years, our students assisted 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. Then suddenly, despite the fact that we have received nothing but good news from both court personnel and the judges who hear these cases, a judge who controls that section concluded that our students should not continue with this work. We are now working with Law Students in Court to re-configure the project to meet the objections of the Court.

- For four years, our students have worked on a 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 as well as supervising attorneys, the essential ingredient of an enthusiastic partner has been lost, which slowed us down significantly. We still provide some assistance on advance directives and have help cancer victims and their law student advocate locate pro bono attorneys to help with employment related matters.

- We continue to work with the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless. When the temperature goes below 32 degrees, students go out in teams to advise the homeless of their rights to shelter, instead of waiting for them to find a place to stay.

- We offered two new opportunities to serve veterans, both in partnership with The Veterans Consortium (TVC). The first occurs every Friday at DC VA Medical Center. There, TVC, the Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP), and the DC VA Medical Center partner with law students and local corporate legal departments to staff a clinic just for veterans. Volunteer attorneys and law students interview veterans and triage cases on a broad spectrum of issues. The second project focuses on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Traumatic Brain Injury Discharge Upgrade. This project aims to assist veterans who were not honorably discharged, thereby causing them to lose many of their VA Benefits. The reason for these types of discharges is typically inappropriate conduct by the veteran. However, when that conduct is solely due to Post
Traumatic Stress Disorder/Traumatic Brain Injury incurred while in service, the loss of those benefits is particularly tragic. This project aims to remedy those situations by involving students in one of three aspects of the effort to restore benefits. The supervising attorney is a recent grad who is currently a fellow at the TVC.

- For several years, we had a successful program that provides assistance to U.S. students and staff at GW in the preparation of federal and local income taxes. Like several of our other pro bono programs, this one integrates classroom learning with real world problems, thereby increasing the value of the experience to both. Unfortunately, the student who had agreed to run the program, which meant recruiting students, training them, and doing all the scheduling, backed out in December and we were unable to find a replacement for what we knew is the vital student cog in the program. We will start early next year and aim to get two students to be in charge.

- Finally, we are exploring ways to involve our alumni (mainly in small firms) in pro bono work, by making students available to assist them. Our successful efforts to persuade the Department of Labor to allow students to volunteer for pro bono work at for profit firms makes this possible, but the challenge remains to connect up the student, the lawyer, and the pro bono project.

Conclusion

The Public Interest & Pro Bono Program has made considerable strides in the past nine 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