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## Dean's Column: In Law School, It's Pro Bono from Day One

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**“We work hand-in-hand with our community partners — like Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Nevada Legal Services and the Clark County Public Defenders — to develop programing and pro bono opportunities.”**

# Dean's Column

BY GUEST COLUMNIST PROF. ANNE R. TRAUM

## IN LAW SCHOOL, IT'S PRO BONO FROM DAY ONE

From day one, community service has been at the heart of the law school's mission to serve Nevada. And on day one — before classes begin — each of our new law students begins his or her legal education with that same commitment. A leader in the field, the law school instituted, at its founding, a 20-hour community service requirement. The Thomas & Mack Legal Clinic provides students with an in-house laboratory for law practice and reform advocacy.

For many, these early-career experiences in pro bono service turn into a lasting and rewarding engagement in pro bono and public interest work during and after law school. This service benefits individual clients and allows our students to gain valuable lawyering skills and professional connections. Just as importantly, our students grasp firsthand the justice gap that real people face every day and are motivated to close that gap.

Access to justice is among the most critical challenges facing the legal profession. Law is a helping service and problem-solving profession, but many Americans are not able to obtain the legal services they need. Lawyers and law students know that there are fewer high-paying law jobs than there were a decade ago. But the problem is not that we have too many lawyers. Instead, we don't have enough lawyers where they are most needed — providing affordable or no-cost legal services. Solving this problem is a complex task. Pro bono services, though surely not the only answer, are critical to reducing the justice gap.

### Community Service Milestone: 50,000 served

Our students learn from pro bono work throughout law school. It all begins in the Community Service Program, created in 1998, by Professor Mary Berkheiser; Barbara Buckley, executive director of Legal Aid Center; and Boyd Associate Dean Christine Smith. In partnership with Legal Aid Center,

students are trained to teach free legal education classes — in such areas as bankruptcy, child custody, guardianship and small claims law. This year, students taught a guardianship class at Opportunity Village and a new class on sealing criminal records, developed in partnership with the Clark County Public Defender. Many students catch the pro bono service bug and want to do more.

Upper-level students can develop their lawyering skills by volunteering for the Partners in Pro Bono Program, which pairs a student with an experienced attorney to work together on a pro bono case. Students who provide 60 hours of pro bono service (above and beyond the 20-hour community service requirement) are honored at graduation with Pro Bono Honors on their transcripts. This year, students will have a new opportunity to assist a volunteer attorney, handling an appeal before the Nevada Supreme Court through the Nevada Appellate Pro Bono Program.

Dean Smith received national honors for her pro bono leadership in 2012, when the American Association of Law Schools awarded Dean Smith the Father Robert Drinan Award for her extraordinary contributions on behalf of pro bono and public interest programs.

### In-house Apprenticeship: Thomas & Mack Legal Clinic

In the Thomas & Mack Legal Clinic, students provide direct pro bono representation to clients and gain hands-on experience handling immigration, appellate, family and juvenile cases, or serving as court-appointed mediators. This fall, students in the Small Business & Non-Profit Clinic, the law school's new transactional clinic, will assist clients with business formation and governance.

What's at stake, in every instance, is one client's problem, but students learn to advocate far beyond that. For example, in 2012, through the Juvenile Justice Clinic, directed by Professor Mary Berkheiser since 2000, students led a successful effort

to end routine shackling of children in Clark County juvenile court. In the Appellate Clinic, students fought for one client, but won a broad rule establishing the right of all immigrants to have access to their own immigration files in immigration court. Many will benefit from that client's case.

Students learn to lead by example. In the Family Justice Clinic, directed by Professor Elizabeth MacDowell, students represent clients whose family relationships have been impacted by parental incarceration, and they have done related legislative advocacy to make such family impacts more transparent at the time of conviction. In an innovative partnership with the Clark County Public Defender, students in the Immigration Clinic, co-directed by Michael Kagan and Fatma Marouf, consult non-citizen defendants on the immigration consequences of criminal convictions. This collaboration is reshaping how institutional players — defense counsel, prosecutors and judges — approach such cases. This year, the Immigration Clinic also earned national recognition for its report on immigration detainee conditions at the Henderson Detention Center, and Professor Marouf testified at a congressional hearing on the reports' key findings.

### **Growing Public Interest Lawyers**

Pro bono lawyering alone cannot close the justice gap. We work hand-in-hand with our community partners — like Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Nevada Legal Services and the Clark County Public Defenders — to develop programing and pro bono opportunities. We grow the public-interest law leaders of the future by awarding scholarships, including the Public Interest Fellowships, Robert Fiass Fellowship and Richard L. Brown Community Service Scholarship. Every student can learn from public service work in our robust externship program.

At UNLV, our commitment to pro bono work teaches our students from day one that the law must serve all, not just some and that, as lawyers, our charge is to make that a reality. ■

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