CREATING CAREER OPTIONS in Public Service

Economic considerations, high tuition, the nature of the placement process—all can work against a law student’s decision to pursue a career in government or public service. The University of Chicago Law School aspires to counter those pressures.

By Catherine Lange

"You are not alone," Dean Geoffrey R. Stone '71 reassured law students considering careers in government or public service. His remarks opened the Law School’s Public Service Law Week last October. Ten events over five days included panels, speakers, and information sessions aimed at increasing students’ awareness of career opportunities in public service, highlighting the resources available to students through the Law School’s Public Service Program.

"You are most assuredly in very good company," Dean Stone continued, explaining that more than 600 alumni, almost 10 percent of all graduates, are currently engaged full-time in government or public service. He pointed out that our "alumni serve as the Governor of Missouri and a Senator from Illinois; public defenders in Chicago and D.A.’s in New York; the State’s Attorney of Cook County and the Minister of Justice of Israel; Counsel to the President’s Intelligence Oversight Board, Parliamentarian to the United States House of Representatives, and Chief Minority Counsel to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. They work at the SEC, the FTC, the FCC, the IRS, the TVA, the USIA, the FERC, the FDA, the EPA, the FDIC and virtually every other abbreviated agency in Washington."

The Law School is committed to training lawyers and scholars who are dedicated to the public good as well as professional excellence. "We cannot expect to have good government, a just society, or a respected profession if the best and brightest of our young lawyers ... eschew public service," said Dean Stone early in his deanship.

To help inspire and support students’ commitment to public service, the Law School’s Public Service Program addresses several important areas. The Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program, established in 1986, provides annual grants to graduates who are employed in public service to enable them to repay their education-related loans.

In addition, the Law School offers Public Service Summer Stipends to students who accept low-paying public service jobs during the summer. The Law School matches funds raised by the Chicago Law Foundation, a student organization that makes grants to students who accept summer public service positions. The Law School also offers fellowships each summer to students who work in the Edwin F Mandel Legal Aid Clinic.

An essential component of the public service environment at the Law School—with about one-third of the students participating—is the Mandel Clinic, founded in 1957 as a joint venture of the Legal Aid Bureau of United Charities and the University of Chicago Law School. Since 1970, staff attorneys at the Clinic have served as clinical teachers of Law School students in one of the nation’s leading clinical legal education programs.
In 1989, Dean Stone created the administrative position of Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Public Service Placement. In that role, Kathryn R. Stell '86 counsels and assists students and graduates who are interested in careers in public service. She also administers the Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program and the Law School’s summer Public Service Awards.

The institution of Public Service Law Week last fall illustrates the Law School’s continuing commitment to making students and graduates aware of the wide variety of career alternatives available to them in the profession.

**Inaugural Public Service Law Week taps students’ interest**

Nadine Strossen, President of the American Civil Liberties Union and keynote speaker at Public Service Law Week, emphasized that public service work not only benefits the public good through a “commitment to justice” but also “benefits the lawyer’s own good and the good of the legal profession.”

“Your professional life will be immeasurably more satisfying if you complement your work with public interest work,” Ms. Strossen advised law students in the near-capacity audience in the Weymouth Kirkland Courtroom. Recognizing that “hybrid” public service work, done within private sector jobs, is available to many lawyers, Strossen stressed that “there is some pro bono work you can do that can be tailor made for you.” Among her suggestions: assist in the incorporation of not-for-profit community groups; volunteer to teach adult education courses; write appellate briefs for public interest organizations; or work with a local prosecutor’s office.

Fred Foreman, United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois, told students attending a panel on Criminal Law, “Most of you will practice law for forty to fifty years. The best years of your legal profession will be working in public service.” On the same panel, Rita Fry, Cook County Public Defender, admitted that with a starting salary of $28,600 in an office like hers, “Money is not the driving force in what you do.” She noted, however, that public service lawyers like those in her office can and do make a difference.

Three key organizers worked to ensure the success of Public Service Law Week. Ms. Stell prepared a 24-page guide to the Law School’s Public Service Program, first distributed during the week. Michael Ruiz ’93 worked tirelessly to publicize the week, producing a logo which appeared on T-shirts sold to raise funds for the program as well as distributing posters and brochures and hanging attention-getting banners and balloons in the Harold J. Green Law Lounge.

**Abner Greene**, Assistant Professor of Law and chair of the Law School’s Faculty Public Service Committee,
devoted much time and effort to draw together panelists and speakers whose presentations would represent the areas of greatest interest. During Public Service Law Week, at least 50, and as many as 100, students attended each of the panels dealing with specific substantive areas of public service practice. In addition to Criminal Law, panels discussed Public Interest Litigation, Government Practice, Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor, Pro Bono, Clinical Legal Education and Law Reform, and Environmental Law.

In a session on "Dealing with Debt," students received information from Ms. Stell; Richard I. Badger '68, Assistant Dean and Dean of Students; and Paul Woo, Director of Placement.

Mr. Woo, with the assistance of Mr. Ruiz, arranged to have representatives from public service employers available throughout the week to speak with students in the Green Law Lounge. Employers included the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, United States Attorney, Community Law Project, The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Illinois Attorney General.

The resources of the James C. Hormel Fund made the concentrated focus of Public Service Law Week possible.

**Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program strengthened**

The Law School recognizes that students who graduate with a substantial burden of debt face economic obstacles in pursuing public service careers. Lawyers starting out in public service agencies can typically expect to earn between $22,000 and $32,000 a year, while starting salaries at law firms often reach $70,000 or more.

Through the Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program, the Law School helps graduates meet their yearly loan indebtedness. Any Law School graduate who, within three years of graduation, begins legal work for a non-profit or governmental organization (excepting judicial clerkships) is eligible to receive an interest-free loan from the Law School. The amount of the loan is determined by a simple formula, based on the graduate’s salary.

For example, a graduate currently working in public service and earning less than $32,000, with an annual debt repayment obligation of $6,000, will receive the full $6,000 from the Law School. A graduate earning more than $32,000 is expected to repay his or her debt in an amount equal to 50 percent of that portion of his or her annual income over $32,000. For example, a student earning $36,000, with an annual debt repayment of $8,000, would receive $6,000 from the Law School but would be expected to repay $2,000.

During the first three years of participation in the Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program, a graduate receives support from the Law School in the form of a loan. No interest accrues on the balance while the graduate is in the program. After three years, the forgiveness component of the program gradually converts the loan into a grant. After his or her third year in the program, 33 percent of the loan is forgiven; after four years, 66 percent of the loan is forgiven; and after five years, 100 percent.

For example, a graduate in the program who receives a loan of $6,000 each year from the Law School and who

**Current participants in the Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program—'88, '89, '90, '91, and '92 graduates—work at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, the Cook County Bar Association Community Law Project, and other public service employers.**

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**Alumni of the Law School work in a variety of public service settings, including:**

- Joint Committee on Taxation
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Office of Legal Counsel
- Office of the Solicitor General
- Office of Consumer Litigation
- Pentagon
- Treasury Department
- Justice Department
- Department of State
- Legal Aid Bureau in Chicago
- Legal Aid Society of Atlanta
- Legal Services Organization of Indiana
- Legal Aid Society of New York
- Legal Assistance Foundation, San Francisco
- Legal Services of Middle Tennessee
- Neighborhood Legal Services in Connecticut
- California Rural Legal Assistance
- Evergreen Legal Services in Seattle
- The Mandel Legal Aid Clinic
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Sierra Club
- California Coastal Commission
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Leadership Conference for Civil Rights
- Environmental and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Justice
- American Civil Liberties Union
- Business and Professional People for the Public Interest
- People’s Law Office in Chicago
- Family Law Center in Michigan
- NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund in Washington
- Cook County Bar Association Community Law Project
- Center to Prevent Handgun Violence
- New York City Law Department
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- American Law Institute
- U.S. House of Representatives
- North Carolina Department of Labor
- U.S. Social Security Administration
- National Labor Relations Board
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Corporation Counsel, City of Chicago
- Office of Consumer Litigation, Washington, D.C.
leaves public service after four years will have $16,000 of the total loan forgiven, but will need to repay $8,000 to the school. If the student stayed in public service for five years, all of the loans would be forgiven.

Current participants in the Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program include graduates of the classes of 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992. Their employers include the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, the Cook County Bar Association Community Law Project, the Iowa State Public Defender, Food Research & Action Center, and the Cook County Public Defender.

“If graduates feel compelled to go to private firms when they prefer to go into public service,” says Ms. Stell, “there’s a diversion of talent and energy that could serve the needs of people who need help—people evicted from their homes, people whose children have been taken from their custody, children who should be removed from abusive homes. There are pressing issues that many of our students would like to address. For a long time, they felt they just couldn’t do it.”

The Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program is “one of the most generous in the country in terms of individual grants,” says Ms. Stell. Several years ago, James C. Hormel ’58, who served as Dean of Students in the Law School from 1961 to 1967 and is currently president of EQUIDEX, Inc., created a fund for this program. Mr. Hormel’s contributions include a recent additional commitment of $500,000 to the James C. Hormel Public Service Fund.

Summer stipends assist students in public service work

Each summer, the Law School assists approximately forty students who want to perform public service work. Ten or more students receive Chicago Law Foundation (CLF) awards; ten to fifteen receive Law School Summer Stipends; and another ten to twelve receive Mandel Legal Aid Clinic Summer Fellowships.

Competition among students for these grants has soared. “The last couple years, it’s been staggering,” says Randall Schmidt ’79, Clinical Professor of Law and administrator of the Clinic’s summer fellowship program. “The largest number of applications we had to the Clinic prior to two years ago was eighteen. Last year, I had 60 students apply.”

“Being able to go to a public service organization and tell them that you can work during the summer for free is a tremendous selling point,” says Mr. Ruiz. He received a CLF grant to work at Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation after his second year at the Law School. He also had the opportunity to work with that organization after his first year, when he received a Law School Public Service Summer Stipend.

In Mr. Ruiz’s case, the two summer grants allowed him to work with an organization that apparently became accustomed to his being there. However, says Mr. Ruiz, “They realized I wasn’t going to get paid by the Law School forever.” He has received and accepted an offer of full-time employment with Land of Lincoln upon graduation. Mr. Ruiz notes that the existence of the Loan Deferment/Forgiveness Program allayed his future employer’s fear that in taking the position he might not be able to repay his student loans.

Law School Public Service Summer Stipends

The Law School Public Service Summer Stipends, administered by Ms. Stell, award as much as $3,000 to students doing legal or legislative work for either a nonprofit organization or local, state, or federal government. Since 1989, approximately twenty students have received public service summer stipends each year from the Law School. Students must work a minimum of ten weeks over the summer, and stipends are adjusted if students receive outside funding.

Recipient of Law School Public Service Summer Stipends have worked with such agencies as: Alaska Public Defender; Women’s Legal Defense Fund; U.S. Attorney’s Office (various jurisdictions); U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities; Competitive Enterprise Institute; and U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee.

“Summer grants can open a path to public service careers,” says Ms. Stell. She notes that six graduates of the class of 1992 who had received Law School summer stipends have gone on to take public service jobs.

These students spent summers with the Chicago Department of Law; West Texas Legal Services; U.S. Attorney, Central District of California; American Civil Liberties Union/AIDS & Civil Liberties Group; and U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Illinois. They are now employed full-time with the U.S. Department of Health &
Human Services; the Tax Division of the U.S. Justice Department; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Los Angeles District Attorney; and the Chicago Legal Clinic, Pilsen Office.

**Chicago Law Foundation Summer Grants**

"It's a tradition," says Robert Nathan, a third-year law student and CLF president, in describing the student organization's annual pledge drive among students and faculty. Ms. Stell characterizes CLF's work as "law students subsidizing their classmates' public service jobs."

In each of the last two years, says Mr. Nathan, student participation reached approximately 70 percent; and between $45,000 and $50,000, including $25,000 in matching funds, has been raised each of those years.

"If a student pledges at the $250 level," Mr. Nathan explains, "the Law School will match $250 and an anonymous donor will give $500, giving CLF a total of $1,000." The Law School provides CLF with up to $10,000 in matching funds; an anonymous donor, an additional $15,000.

CLF awards at least ten full summer grants each year. For the summer of 1992, thirteen grants were awarded. Each student receives up to $4,000 for at least ten weeks of full-time public service work. CLF funds work in a variety of areas but excludes lobbying, government, and political work.

Some of the agencies where CLF summer grantees have worked include: Lawyers for Human Rights, Pretoria, South Africa; Legal Resource Center, Bombay, India; AIDS Legal Council of Chicago; ACLU of Southern California; Coalition for the Homeless; Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights; and New York Legal Aid Society.

**Mandel Legal Aid Clinic Summer Fellowships**

The Mandel Legal Aid Clinic Summer Fellowships go to approximately ten first- and second-year Law School students, providing each with a stipend of $4,000 for thirteen weeks' full-time work in the Clinic. "I don't want students who just want to do the job," says Mr. Schmidt, who administers the fellowship program. "I want students who really want to work in the Clinic."

The Mandel Clinic currently focuses on five projects: Criminal Justice, supervised by Randolph N. Stone, Clinic Director and Clinical Professor of Law; Welfare/Child Support, supervised by Gary Palm '67, Clinical Professor of Law, and Catherine MacCarthy, Clinical Lecturer in Law; Employment Discrimination, supervised by Randall Schmidt, Clinical Professor of Law, and Michelle Kaplan, Clinical Lecturer of Law, and Carolyn Burns '88, Clinical Lecturer of Law; Mental Health, supervised by Mark Heyrman '77, Clinical Professor of Law; and Homeless Assistance, supervised by Lisa Parsons, Clinical Lecturer in Law.

The summer fellows receive the same caseload supervision and support as students who work for the Clinic during the school year. "The only difference," says Mr. Schmidt, "is that during the summer we have twelve students instead of 100, so each student will work on at least six times as many cases."

Students who work at the Clinic receive hands-on training in the practice of law, under the supervision of the Clinic's attorneys. Mr. Heyrman says, "At the beginning, I will act more like a boss. At the end, my students and I will be more like partners, colleagues."

Ann Reading, a third-year student who is currently involved in the Clinic and received a summer fellowship after her first year, says, "Practically—I've learned how to write a complaint, how to write motions, how to deal with clients. I've argued in State court. I've also learned

With nearly 100 students working in the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic during the year, already scarce space becomes scarcer. The above cartoon, drawn by Mark Barnes '93, appeared in the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic Student Association newsletter, captioned: "How many future lawyers can you find?"

"For your first substantive assignment, with one year of legal education behind you, to be drafting briefs for the Seventh Circuit is a fairly amazing experience."

—Seth Levine '93
the tremendous way poor and disabled people are disadvantaged in this country."

**Seth Levine**, also a third-year student and president of the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic Student Association, spent the summer after his first year working in the Clinic. In describing his work that summer with Ms. MacCarthy on *Turner v Chicago Housing Authority*, Mr. Levine says, “For your first substantive assignment, with one year of legal education behind you, to be drafting briefs for the Seventh Circuit is a fairly amazing experience.”

Mr. Levine continued to work on the case, which challenged a CWA policy on both state and constitutional law grounds. He arranged his second-year schedule to earn the necessary credits by the end of the second quarter to comply with the Illinois Supreme Court Rule 711, which allows students working for legal aid organizations to be licensed and to practice law as student practitioners. The rule requires that students have completed three-fifths of the credits needed for graduation.

The oral argument for the case was set for April 1, the beginning of the third quarter. Mr. Levine had earned the necessary credits, and the clinical faculty decided he would argue the case. He appeared before a panel of Seventh Circuit including Judge Richard Cudahy, Judge Walter J. Cummings, Jr., and Judge **Frank Easterbrook** '73. “It was odd,” says Mr. Levine. “I had just finished Judge Easterbrook’s Securities class, and instead of answering his questions as a student, I was answering his questions in court.”

“It wasn’t just a situation where my success or failure would determine my own personal fate,” says Mr. Levine. “In some ways, it determined the fate of a large class of people who had no other voice but the one the Clinic was able to give them.”

“Certainly not every student who has worked in the Clinic has gone into public service,” says Mr. Schmidt, “and not every student who has gone into public interest has worked in the Clinic. But we do have some influence on them.” Ms. Reading, for example, says she came to the Law School expecting to become involved in medical law issues but now hopes to work in poverty law.

The job market for public service positions, however, is tight. “State offices are very tight,” says Ms. Stell. “Organizations in the private nonprofit world are feeling the pinch.”

“Public interest organizations don’t hire people every June or September like law firms,” says Mr. Schmidt. “If they have an opening now, they need to hire someone now. If now is during the school year, a student is not going to get the job.” He urges interested students, regardless of the jobs they take upon graduation, to make contacts in the public interest community.

Mr. Schmidt advises graduates who take positions with firms and are interested in doing pro bono work to learn who acts as the firm’s liaison to groups like Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (CVLS). Lawyers can volunteer for pro bono work, individually or through their firms, with CVLS, which sponsors community-based legal services clinics. The National Lawyers Committee in Washington, D.C., and the Public Interest Law Initiative in Chicago are other clearinghouses for pro bono work.

“Get to know the people who do the work,” says Mr. Schmidt. He advises that if graduates, for example, started working with CVLS doing utility work, they would eventually come in contact with a group like Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI). “When a job opens up with the group,” says Mr. Schmidt, “you’ll know about it, and the agency hiring will know about you.”

“Working in the Clinic, you get a chance to be around others like yourself,” says Mr. Ruiz. “You get reinforcement, support. More important,” he says, “you get to see people like Randolph Stone or Mark Heyman—people who have done this work for an extended period of time. You see that someone else actually has done this. You feel that working in public service isn’t as farfetched an idea as you might have thought. You can work it out.”

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