

**Law Schools as Access to Justice Partners**

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**Brief Description:**

This session will cover the challenges and rewards of partnering with law schools. Panelists will engage participants in a discussion of the challenges in working with law school constituencies and help them to develop strategies to overcome them in order to secure more pro bono volunteers, research assistance, free CLEs, etc. The session will also look at different models, which integrate law students and faculty into legal services work across communities, including the Equal Justice Works Pro Bono Legal Corps, the Minnesota Justice Foundation and Texas Tech School of Law's Wills Project.

**Topical Outline:**

- I. Law School Structure and Function: How do law schools "work"
  - a. Who are the players
  - b. What does the "field" look like?
  - c. Which positions/people on faculty/administration and staff make good public service program partners, and why?
  - d. Understanding and respecting the internal authority (and lack of) of your law school administrative and faculty partners
  
2. Law School Goals: What motivates the players at law schools
  - a. Educational value
  - b. Student satisfaction (students are vocal, have a key, powerful role)
  - c. Funding (tuition doesn't cover costs – fundraising is paramount)
  - d. Rankings (impact of U.S. News and World Report)
  - e. Job training
  
3. Partnerships: What barriers exist to persuading law schools/administration/faculty to be more fully engaged in community and justice issues?

- a. Education: Volunteer service isn't legal education
  - b. Supervision: Level of supervision for volunteer service is not the level of supervision for a clinical experience; students don't know the skills or substance
  - c. Funding: Volunteer host organization competes with school for funding
  - d. Time: Law student time – volunteer service keeps students from books and on-campus organizations, providing vitality to law school community and higher grades means better more graduates hired in higher paying, more visible, jobs.
4. Legal Services Community: How does the community "work"
- a. What challenges and rewards are there to working with clinical programs?
  - b. What value is there in working with students.
  - c. Staff and other resources
  - d. Client need
  - e. Timing
5. Partnerships – Solutions. How can we better understand how to partner with and tap into resources at law schools?
- a. Necessary legal services delivery and/or quality legal education
  - b. Resources follow mission.
  - c. Strengthen existing partnerships, turn two individual partnerships into one for program support. Law firms fund both community organizations and law schools. Work with your funders to strengthen your on-campus programs.
  - d. Volunteer service develops legal skills and a network of references for students; and will strengthen her/his "hirability" (examples of students hired because of their pro bono service)
  - e. Alumni like to give to public service programs
  - f. Volunteer opportunities teach legal skills and substantive areas of law
  - g. A volunteer opportunity is a realistic snapshot of legal services or pro bono work
  - h. Appropriate training gives students adequate foundation to provide service
  - i. Evening, weekend and research placements help eliminate the barrier students often face to service – timing.
  - j. Projects that use students efficiently
    - i. LSC funded.
    - ii. Pro bono organizations. e.g., Public Counsel in Los Angeles, Public Interest Clearinghouse.
    - iii. For example, Public Counsel has been effective at using law students. The program has developed bite-size, short-term projects. A sample project - training on general relief. Program staff train students on regulations and forms, then a team of students goes to an office.

## 6. Examples of partnerships

- a. Texas Tech University School of Law Clinical Program
  - i. Pro Bono Clinics
    - 1. Faculty – TTU Law School faculty co-sponsor pro bono clinics held by Legal Aid of Northwest Texas Equal Justice Volunteer Program once a year – twice a month
    - 2. Provide the necessary faculty volunteers to staff clinics
    - 3. Accept cases or provide brief advice/counsel
  - ii. Clinical Courses
    - 1. Clinic faculty require students to volunteer at two or more pro bono clinics sponsored by Legal Aid of Northwest Texas as part of course assignment
    - 2. Cases accepted for the civil clinic and family law counseling are referrals from Legal Aid of Northwest Texas
  - iii. Volunteer Law Students Association
    - 1. Provides volunteers to assist at pro bono clinics
    - 2. Clinical Program staff or EJVP coordinator provide orientation to students
  - iv. Wills Project
    - 1. Partnership between Civil Clinic, Legal Aid of Northwest Texas and the Wills and Trusts Class
    - 2. Four clinics are scheduled throughout the community during fall semester
    - 3. Legal Aid of Northwest Texas EJVP Coordinator promotes the clinics through radio, television and newspaper PSAs, as well as prepares and distributes flyers to social service agencies, community centers, etc. EJVP Coordinator schedules the client appointments for the clinics.
    - 4. 132-134 students draft questionnaires, conduct interviews, draft wills and oversee execution of wills. Students work in groups of four.
    - 5. Civil Clinic faculty member supervises students until the cases are completed.
    - 6. Guide to establishing a wills project is attached
- b. Minnesota Justice Foundation
  - i. Law School Public Service Program
  - ii. All four Minnesota law schools encourage all students to perform at least 50 hours of law-related public service during law school.
  - iii. Approximately 150 legal services and advocacy organizations participate, creating 2,500 volunteer opportunities for law students each year.
  - iv. See [http://www.mnjustice.org/student\\_vol\\_opportunities.asp](http://www.mnjustice.org/student_vol_opportunities.asp) for a sample of currently available opportunities. Students can select opportunities based on a specific area of law, location, time commitment or task.

- v. Opportunities are short term, such as one afternoon or weekend, over spring break, through a semester or academic year, or independent research projects.
  - vi. Students completing at least 50 hours receive a notation on their transcript, as well as recognition by MJF at a community-wide ceremony and by their own law schools during graduation.
- c. Equal Justice Works
- i. Pro Bono Legal Corps - AmeriCorps attorneys serve at approximately 20 sites around the country.
  - ii. Members work at pro bono organizations to promote public interest at law schools and among their law students.
  - iii. Members develop quality pro bono opportunities for law students and others to expand legal resources in low income and underserved communities.
  - iv. Members gain hands-on law-related expertise and experience to inform their work by
    - 1. providing direct legal assistance
    - 2. developing substantive legal resources at the host organization
    - 3. and/or expanding the capacity of the host organization's existing pro bono activities.