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Boston College Law School
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12/20/07--Boston College Law School's commitment to loan repayment assistance for graduates pursuing public interest careers will reach an all-time high again this year. The scholarship committee recently awarded over $260,000 in loan repayment assistance to new and recent alumni who are currently practicing public interest law. A total of 65 people received awards, according to the committee, compared to 64 last year.

The Law School's Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) has seen significant increases over the past few years. In the last three years alone, the LRAP has dispensed over three quarters of a million dollars in assistance. In 2005, the total amount awarded was $180,000 to 53 recipients; in 2001, it was $81,000 to 22 recipients.

"The Scholarship Committee is delighted that we have been able to meet the needs of our graduates who are practicing in the public sector," said Committee Chair and Director of Career Services Maris Abbene. "We are grateful to all of our Alumni who have supported the School. These gifts allow us to assist our graduates who serve the greater good and continue the mission of the law school to educate 'lawyers who lead good lives.' "

In a report put out by Equal Justice Works last year called 'Financing the Future: Responses to the Rising Debt of Law Students,' researchers claimed that "High debt and low salaries affect recruitment and retention in the government and nonprofit work force and threaten to strike a debilitating blow to the future of full-time public service." This report noted that the average law-school graduate owes between $50,000 and $80,000 in student loans while the median starting salary for lawyers in government or non-profit work is around $40,000. Compare this to the $135,000 that the average associate will earn in a big city, and it is no wonder that few lawyers are choosing the public sector. This study claims that as a result, low-income people are being denied access to justice.

LRAP aims to counter this imbalance. True to its Jesuit ideal of service to others, the Law School has never turned away a qualified recipient for LRAP. The Program was started by William F. Willier, a former BC Law professor who was instrumental in establishing an endowed fund for this purpose. Today, annual giving from alumni and friends to the Law School Fund, along with income from other endowed funds provide funding for LRAP.

Graduates often point to LRAP as the reason they are able to go into public interest work. LRAP recipients are, among other things, assistant district attorneys, legal service attorneys, public defenders, government mediators, immigration lawyers, health law advocates, victims rights advocates and juvenile law advocates.

Participants are eligible to remain in the program until their income in public sector employment exceeds $60,000. Numerous recipients have been in the program for five years or more.