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Law School Funds 68% Increase in Summer Stipends

5/10/02--The Boston College Law School community has responded to this year’s rise in demand for summer public interest placements by dramatically increasing the number of positions it is funding by 68% over last year. This unusual increase in funding is an example of the commitment to public service that is shared by the school and by its students and alumni.

"This summer has been a demanding time for the public interest work-study program," said Associate Director for Public Interest Programs Freda Fishman. "As funding for non-profit and government agencies tightens in the slowed economy, their ability to hire summer interns drops. But the need remains. At the same time, we've seen an increased interest in public service placements, particularly among first year students. The challenge was in raising the money to match the need."

The Law School’s 68% increase in funding over last summer was made possible by the enthusiastic participation of the faculty, staff and students in this year's Public Interest Law Foundation (PILF) auction, and by the generosity of alumni donors.

"There are several groups who deserve credit for these grants," said BC Law Dean John H. Garvey. "I would like to thank especially the many alumni who gave so generously to the Law School Fund this year. Their kindness has made it possible for students --particularly first-years -- to secure interesting and rewarding public interest jobs for the summer. I hope our students who benefit from the Fund today will replenish it for tomorrow's students when they graduate."

Boston College Law School encourages its students to do legal work in the summers starting with their first year. While second year summer jobs are often seen as try-outs for permanent placements, first year summer jobs are an opportunity for students to sample areas of practice just for the experience. Many first year students opt for public service work after their first year of law school, including direct provision of legal services to the poor, government service, or advocacy and policy work in non-profits relating to particular issues, such as environmental protection, or particular populations, such as the elderly or the homeless. Often, this experience results in a decision to pursue a public interest career, or in a long-term commitment to pro bono work and charitable giving by BC Law graduates who take jobs in the private sector.

The majority of funding for these opportunities comes from federal work-study grants that provide summer stipends to law students doing public interest jobs, Fishman says. However, federal law requires that non-profit employers pay up to a third of the total summer stipend, with federal funds paying the rest. "Typically even that one-third contribution is beyond the means of these organizations. But given the financial demands of school and living expenses, few of our students can afford to work as volunteers."

Bridging the gap are the two equally essential means of support: the fundraising efforts of the student-run PILF, with their auction and Work-a-Day fund drive, and the contributions of BC Law alumni who recognize the value of law students performing public interest work, both for
their own professional development and as a significant community benefit provided by the law school, consistent with its Jesuit mission. These funds are used to sponsor work-study positions in government agencies, courts and non-profits throughout the Commonwealth and the country.

While this level of funding may not be sustainable without a continuing commitment by the donors, Fishman says, the Law School is pleased and proud that donations made it possible to support so many students in their public service efforts this year.

Visit the PILF website