LRAP Continues Record Pace

Boston College Law School

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Newton, MA--Boston College Law School’s commitment to loan repayment assistance for graduates pursuing public interest careers reached an all-time high again this year. The Scholarship Committee awarded $333,840 in loan repayment assistance to 76 new and recent alumni who are currently practicing in the public sector.

The Law School’s Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) has seen significant increases over the past few years. In the last four years alone, the LRAP has awarded over one 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.

In recent years, the Boston College Law School Graduating Classes have made LRAP assistance their priority and have pledged their Class Gifts to support their peers. The pledges consist of five-year commitments. The Class of 2009 contributed $151,810 in pledges, and two matching gifts brought the grand total to $240,000. Board of Overseers Chair David Weinstein pledged a gift that escalated with the percentage of Class involvement; by surpassing the 80% mark, the Class earned a matching gift of $50,000. The other matching gift, the Dean’s Match, was $40,000 in funds added to the LRAP from the Law School Fund, $2,500 for every $10,000 pledged. To date, despite these challenging economic times, the Class of 2010 has already pledged $115,510 and reached 82% participation.

"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, particularly our recent grades who are just beginning their careers. 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 Equal Justice Works' comprehensive report 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.

BC Law’s 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 $65,000. Twenty current recipients have been in the program for five years or more.