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Boston College Law School

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Loan Repayment Assistance Program Reaches Record Levels

2/22/07--BC Law's LRAP program will pay out over a quarter of a million dollars this year, far above the previous year's level and an all-time high.

2/22/07--Boston College Law School's commitment to loan repayment assistance for graduates pursuing public interest careers will reach all-time record levels this year. The scholarship committee recently awarded over $250,000 in loan repayment assistance to new and recent alumni who are currently practicing public interest law. A total of 64 people received awards, according to the committee.

The Law School's Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) has seen significant increases over the past few years. Last year, the total awarded was $180,000 to 53 recipients; in 2001, it was $81,000 to 22 recipients.

"BC Law is very fortunate to be able to meet a clearly escalating need among graduates who have chosen to devote their careers to vitally important--and historically low-paying--public interest jobs," said BC Law Dean John H. Garvey. "The Law School was able to provide this award largely through the generosity of those who give to the Law School Fund, which ensures the strength and flexibility of the Law School to meet our community's needs by funding such important programs as our LRAP program, scholarships, and public interest stipends."

In a recent report put out by Equal Justice Works called 'Financing the Future: Responses to the Rising Debt or 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 the Willier and other endowed funds (including the Curtin, Holly Reilly, Arthur Harris, and the Henry Leen Funds, among others), provides funding for LRAP.

The difference between the Law School Fund and the endowed funds, explains Associate Dean of Institutional Advancement Marianne Lord, is that endowments are meant for growth and support for future needs. "We spend 5 percent annually from each of these funds. The remainder of growth and income, if any, is plowed back into the fund to produce income for subsequent years. Conversely with the Law School Fund, money raised is money spent. The investment is in human capital."

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.

"LRAP is a privilege for me because it has given me certain freedoms -- the freedom to not be focused on the financial constraints of law school; the freedom to serve the public in a career that I love and where I can best utilize my talents and gifts; and the freedom to not have to spend a lot of time and energy worrying about the practical demands of living in such an expensive city," said recent recipient Kathleen Celio (BC Law '05). "Moreover, because the law school has continued to be more generous and committed to giving LRAP gifts, I can trust that the freedoms that I now enjoy from my LRAP gift will continue in the future. Last, having the law school committed to funding a robust LRAP will also enable law students to recognize these freedoms at an earlier stage in their legal education so that they can discern what career path they feel would be best suited to their interests and the needs of society."

Recipient's salaries range from $30,500 to $57,000. The lowest debt for anyone in the program is $25,200; the highest is $167,600. Participants are eligible to remain in the Willier program until their income in public sector employment exceeds $58,000. Numerous recipients have been in the program for five years or more.

"The Committee is particularly grateful for the Alumni Council’s decision to contribute proceeds from their signature event, Law Day, to the LSF in support of our LRAP program," said Scholarship Committee Chair and Director of Career Services Maris Abbene. "This type of gift allows us to support our graduates in their heroic efforts to serve the greater good and continue the mission of the law school to educate 'lawyers who lead good lives.'"