

Proposal for OU Law Pro Bono Program
“Students for Access to Justice”

Agenda Item for December 6th 2005 Faculty Meeting
[Moved and passed as made]

December 5, 2005

Dear Faculty & Colleagues:

The OU Law Pro Bono Program began in April 2004. Since then, over 90 students have volunteered with 24 non-profit, governmental or judicial offices in Oklahoma City and surrounding counties, providing about 3,500 hours in pro bono legal services. The program, now named Students for Access to Justice (SATJ), has achieved a great deal in its infancy, and has been enthusiastically received by attorneys and students involved in volunteer placements. Noteworthy projects have included preparation of a legal memorandum and proposed recommendations to the OBA on ethical issues of “unbundled” legal services; a brief in support of aliens’ rights in the United States; and a presentation to promote anti-bullying legislation in Oklahoma. Other students have helped to represent children in abuse or neglect cases, worked as CASA volunteers, or as unpaid judicial law clerks. SATJ was featured in a workshop at the Equal Justice Works Conference in Washington D.C. held on October 28th, 2005.

The program plans to expand the opportunities for students to volunteer, and would like to offer recognition for these students’ public service, law-related activities. These ideas are drawn from positive experiences at other law schools around the country, and are designed to promote and honor a culture of public service, a traditional hallmark of the legal profession.

Adoption and implementation of these recommendations will provide favorable evidence for accreditation purposes, as well as for the university’s departmental review. ABA Accreditation standards now require that each law school afford students with substantial opportunities for participation in pro bono activities. Standard 302(b)(2). The University of Oklahoma Campus Departmental Review Recommendations, and Provost Mergler’s discussion of those recommendations specifically focused on the need for expanded service learning, embedded into the curriculum, and for other curricular changes that recognize the importance of ethics in the legal profession.

It is therefore proposed that the faculty approve the following three mechanisms to recognize and honor law students’ participation in volunteer legal services.

- *Recognition at Graduation for Law Students:* notation by name or designation with asterisk(*) in graduation program identifying students who have volunteered a minimum of 50 hours of pro bono legal services during their law school career, either through the SATJ, or through other verifiable pro bono legal service

- projects. These students will also be eligible to purchase a cord to wear at commencement that visibly signifies their contributions.
- *Reception Celebrating Pro Bono Spirit:* hold a public reception in the spring semester to honor the volunteer legal work done by students and faculty, and to recognize the various programs which have benefited from this collaboration. Students who volunteered a minimum of 25 hours in law-related services since May 1 of the prior year will receive Service Certificates. Certificates of High Distinction will be awarded to those who volunteered between 26-49 hours in a year; and certificates of Highest Distinction will be awarded to those who volunteered 50 or more hours in a year.
 - *Transcript:* Explore the feasibility of transcript notation for different service levels; there may be applicable State Regents Policies.

Respectfully submitted,

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