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### Pro Bono Projects Broaden Opportunities, Instill Values

Hannah L. Buxbaum

*Indiana University - Bloomington*

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Maurer School of Law  
Bloomington

# Pro bono projects broaden opportunities, instill values

Preparing students for the rigors and complexity of today's legal profession requires schools to focus not only on doctrinal analysis, but also on the complete set of professional competencies that successful lawyers require. Toward that end, the faculty at the I.U. Maurer School of Law has adopted a series of initiatives aimed at expanding the range of experiential learning opportunities available to our students.

Maurer students can get hands-on experience through several full-scale clinics, where they work on real solutions for real clients under the supervision of a faculty member. They can also participate in externships in a variety of practice settings, either during the academic year or in the summer. These opportunities give our students a practical context in which they can learn to deploy the substantive law they have been studying in other classes.

Another arena for experiential learning is our pro bono "projects." As lawyers, we have a commitment to provide the best possible advice to our clients, while promoting equal access to justice for all members of our community. At Maurer, our students' pro bono commitment starts in the very first year – with tangible benefits that last far beyond graduation.



## Dean's Desk

Hannah Buxbaum  
Indiana University  
Maurer School of Law

In 2009, we adopted an aspirational goal encouraging students to fulfill 60 hours of pro bono work during their three years of schooling. Although this was not a mandatory goal, our hope was that students would dedicate an average of 20 hours each year to providing law-related services without pay or academic credit.

Three years later, our pro bono program – Access to Justice – has become a central feature of student life in our community. More than 300 Indiana Law students (40 percent of our enrollment) contributed an aggregate of 24,740 hours of community service in 2012. Many students fulfill their requirement by participating in one of our projects:

Our *Pro Bono Immigration Project* enables students to support the unmet legal needs of non-citizens in Bloomington and central Indiana. New in 2012, this project helps immigrants with visa and citizenship-related matters, assists refugees with requests for asylum, and joins forces with other related organizations, such as the Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic in Indianapolis. Fifty first-year students signed up to volunteer this year; 11 clients have already been served since PIP's founding.

Indiana Law's *Protective Order Project* offers free legal help to people who have suffered domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, harassment or stalking. POP student volunteers are trained to support clients throughout the filing and renewal of a protective order petition. In 2012, more than 40 clients received assistance from POP.

The *LGBT Project* engages students, attorneys, scholars and lesbian, gay, bisex-

ual and transgender advocates to research and analyze legal issues affecting the rights of Indiana's LGBT residents. Following a successful pilot in the spring of 2012, this project is pursuing important initiatives such as anti-bullying policies in Indiana schools, anti-discrimination ordinances and research on the impact of marriage inequality in Indiana.

Inmates at the federal prison in Terre Haute receive assistance from students participating in the *Inmate Legal Assistance Project*. Volunteers are exposed to a wide variety of legal matters, from direct appeals and ineffective assistance of counsel to tort claims, family law, and other civil issues. Twenty-one students are participating in ILAP this semester.

Monroe County tenants facing immediate eviction get help from Maurer's *Tenant Assistance Project*. Forty-one TAP volunteers offer advice, negotiate on behalf of tenants, and refer more complex cases to Indiana Legal Services and other pro bono organizations.

Our *Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Project* offers free tax assistance to low-income, elderly, disabled, and limited English-speaking residents of Monroe County. The walk-in clinic includes an assessment of whether clients are taking advantage of all available benefits, including the earned income tax credit. Volunteers from Indiana Law and the I.U. Kelley School of Business are trained and certified by the Internal Revenue Service. In 2012, more than 400 clients benefited from VITA.

Besides providing innovative learning

experiences for our students, these programs are important for another reason: They help inculcate the values of pro bono service in our students before they begin practicing. Doing so yields at least three benefits:

*Hands-on experience.* Graduates entering the legal marketplace need all the advantages they can get. Being able to demonstrate to potential employers that they have done real legal work for real clients will help students secure full-time employment.

*The social justice habit.* There's no better time to develop good pro bono habits than when a student is in law school. Setting goals and working to achieve them is an important discipline that yields rewards throughout one's professional life. By the time our students have graduated, they've made pro bono work an integral part of their professional life.

*The right thing to do.* With professional success comes responsibility. Being a lawyer can be professionally and financially rewarding, and pro bono representation is a measurable and tangible way to give back to the community that has contributed to our success.

Our pro bono projects prepare students for the practice of law while instilling the important professional values of service to the community and equal access to justice for all. I am impressed by our students' commitment to these projects and confident that they will be better lawyers because of it. •

■ **Hannah L. Buxbaum** is Interim Dean and John E. Schiller Chair in Legal Ethics at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law. The opinions expressed are the author's.