

185,715 PRO BONO HOURS COMPLETED IN 20 YEARS

During the 2008–09 academic year, Tulane Law School students logged more than 19,000 pro bono hours. This brings the documented total hours contributed since the Community Service Program officially began 20 years ago to an amazing 185,715. While the majority of contributions occur in local communities, placements are scattered across the United States and as far away as Italy, Thailand, and South Africa. Last year alone, more than 100 different organizations benefited from Tulane law students' generous volunteer work.

As Assistant Dean for Public Interest Programs, Julie Jackson's principal responsibility is administering the law school Pro Bono Program, which she and Program Coordinator Eileen Ryan launched in 1988 when the Tulane Community Service Program became the first mandatory pro bono program in the nation. Prior to putting the program into practice, in the fall of 1987 the Tulane Law School faculty voted unanimously on a student requirement of a minimum 20 hours pro bono work on behalf of indigent clients. Two decades later, law students across the nation have followed Tulane's example as 34 other law schools added a public service/pro bono requirement.

Jackson has continued to oversee the program as it has grown in size and scope to encompass a wide range of public interest legal opportunities in various locales. While the program's development over the past two decades brings

Jackson a personal level of satisfaction, she says the concept of a pro bono requirement, "which would instill in every Tulane law student the duty of the lawyer to serve the community," belongs to her mentor, the late Tulane Law School Dean John Kramer (1986–1996).

"It has been my privilege to be the one charged with the responsibility of taking this inspiring idea and running with it," Jackson states. "Over the past 20 years it has been my role to establish at Tulane the first mandatory pro bono program in the nation and then to guide its growth into a major source of free legal assistance for those in need as well as experiential public interest education for our students."

Following Hurricane Katrina, the faculty voted in 2006 to expand the definition of qualifying pro bono service and to increase the number of service hours each student must contribute. As a result, each graduating student as of the class of 2009 must complete a minimum of 30 hours of pro bono service in order to receive a law diploma. Interestingly enough, 76% of the '09 class exceeded the increased requirement.

Qualifying public interest service includes legal assistance provided to persons of limited means; work performed in the public sector on behalf of most local, state or federal government entities; work on behalf of qualifying public interest nonprofit organizations; and contributions to qualifying student-led organizations serving public interest law-related goals.



ROLE MODEL WALKS THE WALK

FOR SOME STUDENTS such as Holmes E. Rackleff (L '09), 30 hours of pro bono work is like a "walk in the park." Upon graduating this past May, Rackleff had reported an extraordinary 507.5 hours of pro bono service.

Rackleff decided to attend Tulane Law School while gutting houses in the 9th Ward of New Orleans in December of 2005. Upon moving to New Orleans in April of 2006, Rackleff volunteered, coordinated, created and participated in much more than the average graduate student. Her involvement in and around New Orleans ranged from the Tulane chapter of the National Lawyers Guild to the National Student Day Against the Death Penalty, Saturdays at the Common Ground Relief free legal clinic and work with the Entertainment Law Legal Assistance (ELLA).

"Throughout her law school career, Holmes demonstrated the utmost dedication to providing legal services to the poor," said Assistant Dean Julie Jackson. "Through her contributions on so many pro bono fronts, she provided a role model for all."

Since graduating, Rackleff works as a film contracts consultant in New York City. She is developing a grant-funded legal aid program in Brooklyn.

Students do not earn academic credit for their pro bono work. Instead, individual transcripts reflect the total number of certified pro bono hours performed by the individual student.