

# Public Interest

**As the first law school founded by women**, the goals of advancing the causes of underprivileged and underrepresented people were at the core of American University Washington College of Law from its start in 1896.

**I decided to go to law school to gain the practical and technical knowledge to more effectively advocate for social justice, both domestically and internationally. WCL's commitment to public interest and international law brought those two together wonderfully.**

— Lindsay Jenkins, 2008

This commitment continues today, with the Office of Public Interest (OPI), which seeks to educate law students about their professional responsibility to perform public service work as practicing attorneys, fostering a lifelong commitment to public service. OPI provides a variety of services for students pursuing public interest and pro bono activities during law school and after graduation. Most importantly, the OPI highlights students achievement in public interest and pro bono activities and provides recognition for these accomplishments.

WCL's public interest programs are among the strongest in the nation. This vibrant activist community offers unique opportunities for law students to gain legal experience through a broad range of pro bono and public service programs such as:

- Top-Ranked Renowned Clinical Program
- Full-Tuition Public Interest/Public Service (PIPS) Scholarship
- Equal Justice Foundation Fellowships for summer internships
- Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Teaching Fellowships Project
- Public Interest Loan Repayment Assistance Program (PILRAP)
- Public Interest Roundtable Series
- IMBY (In My Back Yard) Public Service Day
- Pro Bono Honors Pledge Program
- Supervised Externship Program
- More than a dozen public interest centers and publications
- United Nations Commission Against Torture Project
- Program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property
- Individualized public interest career development counseling through the Office of Career and Professional Development



## Facts About Public Interest Activity at the Washington College of Law

- Typically 8–11% of WCL graduates accept postgraduate public interest employment, far higher than the national average of 3%.
- Typically an additional 17–20% of WCL graduates secure employment in the government sector.
- In 2006, 38 students received funding to pursue summer public interest internships from the Equal Justice Foundation.
- Students in the class of 2006 who participated in the Pro Bono Honors Pledge Program completed an average of 233 hours of pro bono work prior to graduation.
- Forty students traveled to New Orleans during the 2006–2007 Winter Break to assist with post-Katrina legal and community service projects.

## Contact Information

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**Law school seemed like a logical step to get to what I wanted to do: both serve individual clients and work with communities on issues of systemic change. The progressive, active campus attracted me as non-traditional and welcoming of new ideas. The faculty, staff and students make WCL top-rate.**

— Parag Khandhar, 2008

Constitutional Literacy Project. Every year WCL is one of the host schools for the Greater Washington, D.C./Baltimore Public Service Career Fair. The fair offers law students an opportunity to learn about public interest organizations and government agencies and to interview for summer and post-graduate positions. Each spring the Externship Program coordinates an Externship Fair with typically more than 130 employers and 400 students participating. The Externship Program places hundreds of upper-level students each year in externships with government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, courts and law firms engaged in pro bono work.

## **Students and Alumni**

Students arrive at WCL with a variety of backgrounds and interests including: environmental activism, women's rights, civil rights, international human rights, labor and employment, criminal justice, juvenile justice, land use, and war crimes tribunals. Upon graduating from WCL they continue to work on social justice issues as nonprofit staff attorneys, policy advocates, government attorneys and litigators in public interest law firms.

WCL graduates have been very successful and securing prestigious fellowships. Since 1998, graduates have received more than 30 postgraduate public interest legal fellowships with programs such as: Skadden, Equal Justice Works, Echoing Green, Soros, Women's Law and Public Policy, and New Voices. The Assistant Director & Public Interest Specialist in the Office of Career and Professional Development provides career seeking resources and counseling for students planning public interest or government careers.

## **Research and Networking Opportunities**

At WCL students have the opportunity to network with practitioners while participating in many public interest activities and programs. Students conduct research as faculty Dean's Fellows, and volunteer with the War Crimes Research Office, Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Innocence Project, and the Health Law Project, among other programs. In addition, there are many domestic and international for-credit opportunities through the Clinical Program, externships and the Marshall-Brennan

## **Many WCL alumni have created their own nonprofit organizations. Some of these include:**

- Women Empowered Against Violence (WEAVE), Washington, DC
- Tahirih Justice Center, Falls Church, VA
- Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Zacatecas, Mexico
- Mentoring ToDAY (To Develop the Aspirations of Youth), Washington, DC

## **Examples of WCL alumni placement at Public Interest/Public Service organizations and agencies:**

- Mental Disability Rights International
- Center for Justice and International Law
- Los Angeles County Public Defender
- U.S. Helsinki Commission
- U.S. Department of Justice Immigration Court
- Whitman-Walker Clinic
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts District Attorney's Office
- Bronx District Attorney's Office
- International Intellectual Property Institute
- D.C. Prisoner's Legal Services Project
- Pennsylvania Department of Education
- New York City Law Department
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- ACLU of Chicago
- National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Law Center
- Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services
- Los Angeles City Attorney's Office
- Florida Public Service Commission
- U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education & the Workforce
- Public International Law & Policy Group's Field Office, Colombo, Sri Lanka