

Therefore, search and see if there is not some place where you may invest your humanity. - Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)

About Time for an LRAP at DePaul Law?

What is an LRAP?

LRAP is an acronym for Loan Repayment Assistance Program. In the law-school context, LRAPs exist to help graduates manage their educational debt while working in the public sector. Take a [fictional] public-interest law student, Pearl, who started at DePaul full-time in 2004. DePaul Law's tuition for the Class of 2006 is \$26,500/year. This does not include books, room, board, medical and transportation expenses, (say \$18,000/year). Therefore, in Pearl's 1L year, when she is discouraged from working, she will incur about \$45,000 in debt. In her second and third years, Pearl may have a low-paying job (\$10/hour, 20/hours a week) at a public service organization, or attain funding from an outside source to work in public interest law. This may amount to \$5000/year, bringing her total debt close to \$125,000. To pay this off in 10 years, Pearl will owe over \$1100/mo., depending on interest rates. If Pearl is hired by the Cook County Public Defender (starting salary \$43,000), her loans may constitute as much as 1/3 of her monthly expenses. Financial aid specialists advise against a debtor paying more than 15% of her monthly income towards loan payments.¹

The Legal Aid Safety Net: A Report on the Legal Needs of Low-Income Illinoisans (2005) reports that the high level of turnover among front-line legal aid providers "represents a simmering crisis."² One major culprit, the report contends, is low salaries coupled with high levels of educational debt. In *Financing the Future: Equal Justice Works 2004 Report on Law*, the report notes that from 1992 to 2002, the average cost of tuition for a J.D. degree almost doubled across the board (public and

private).³ While educational costs soar, public sector salaries have failed to keep pace. To make matters worse, the percentage of people living in poverty in the U.S. has also continued to rise, heightening the need for legal aid services.⁴



DePaul College of Law's 2005 Spring Graduates celebrate their degrees, but not their educational debts.

Why does DePaul need an LRAP?

DePaul University is rooted in the Vincentian values of service, community and social justice. Within the College of Law, a highly committed and enthusiastic group of public-interest-minded students and faculty are focused on fulfilling the University's mission. Without financial help in paying off their debt, however, most law graduates are unable to afford serving their communities through public sector employment. Implementation of an LRAP would be consistent with the University's values. An LRAP would also place DePaul's law program in a similar position to most other regional law schools (Notre Dame, University of Illinois, Northwestern, Loyola, University of Chicago, Marquette and Valparaiso).

Why doesn't DePaul have an LRAP?

Equal Justice Works' website reads, "DePaul University has a draft LRAP program... The school

has recently decided to dedicate seed money to LRAP."⁵ Although a decision has been made, DePaul has yet to dedicate money to an LRAP. DePaul Law's Development Director, Trish Richardson, has said that until the students take charge and commit themselves to annual fees relating to an LRAP, no potential donor will want to commit to funding an LRAP. Such an effort was recently completed by the students at the University of Illinois College of Law.

In the spring, the Illinois law student body passed a referendum during their yearly SBA elections, agreeing to be charged an extra \$12.50 fee per semester to be committed to financing an LRAP. Soon after the referendum was passed, an Illinois alum pledged \$100,000 to the LRAP fund and the school began to disburse monies.⁶

Why should I support an LRAP?

Supporting an LRAP will benefit all students and alums by raising the prestige and competitiveness of DePaul's College of Law. All but three of the top 25 law schools in the country maintain an LRAP. LRAPs increase a law school's competitiveness by increasing its capacity to attract and retain applicants, encouraging a more diverse student body, and assisting public interest organizations in recruiting and retaining public interest lawyers.⁷

While many students plan for a career in corporate or patent law, there is a vast need for

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ALUMPROFILE

NAME: **Robert F. Harris**

TITLE: **Cook County Public Guardian**

BORN: Chicago, Illinois

EDUCATION: DePaul College of Law, 1991;
University of Illinois, B.S. Industrial Engineering
(practiced engineering for six years, working for
Westinghouse and Honeywell).

Q: *Why did you decide to go to law school?*

I obtained my engineering degree because many of my relatives are engineers. They told me that engineering was a great way to make a decent living. They are right, but I didn't like engineering. I always wanted to be a lawyer; my cousins and I talked about opening a law firm one day. I wanted to make more of a difference.

Q: *Why did you choose DePaul?*

I chose DePaul because it is located in a large metropolitan area which allows you to make lots of contacts. I knew that I would be exposed to many areas of the law, and I knew that I could gain valuable experience all year, not just during the summer. In addition, DePaul is a Catholic-affiliated university with a reputation for commitment to public service.

Q: *What did you like best about DePaul?*

DePaul was very supportive of student organizations, including the Black Law Student Association of which I was a member.

Q: *Why public interest law?*

Public interest law is so rewarding. While I was at DePaul, I volunteered at Cabrini Green Legal Aid. I thought I would be there forever. Then, one of the staff attorneys from Cabrini went to the Office of the Cook County Public Guardian. After I graduated from DePaul, he asked me to interview. I had no idea what OPG did, but I interviewed and got the job. I have been here ever since- more than 14 years ago.

Q: *What advice can you provide to law students interested in public interest law?*

Expose yourself to as many sectors of public interest law as you can. Research the public interest areas of the law that you are interested in and see just how many agencies are out there. If you cannot find a paid position, volunteer! It is very important to obtain real world experience before you graduate.

DePaul Public Interest Law Program



From the Public Interest Law Program's January 19 event, "Doing the Right Thing: Working in Public Interest", featured speakers L to R: Robert Harris, OPG; Professor Len Cavise; Mary Meg McCarthy, MIHRC; Ed Grossman, Chicago Legal Clinic; Furmin Sessoms, Cook County Deputy Public Defender.

Q: *What qualities do you look for in a job candidate?*

Work experience in the public interest law sector is important. Specifically, experience in the public interest area of interest to you is helpful. Participate in clinics at school. Take trial advocacy. You need to show that you have a lifelong interest in public interest law. You need to prove that when you end up with a low salary and a high case load, you will stick around for the internal rewards that public interest law brings.

Q: *What do you think needs to change in public interest law?*

Average case loads need to decrease. We need to lobby our legislators for more money for public interest attorneys and for loan repayment assistance programs. We need more minorities to represent the overwhelming percentage of minority clients. At OPG, we also need to decrease the amount of minorities that are represented. Abuse and neglect happens in all types of families, not just in minority families.

Q: *What area of public interest law do you think will be most in demand in the future?*

All areas of public interest law will always be in great demand. However, I look for elder law demand to really increase. America's population is aging. OPG has an Adult Guardianship Division which addresses disabled elder law issues.

Time for an LRAP? *continued from page one...*

well-educated and dedicated public interest attorneys. Choosing a career in public interest comes with many benefits but creates a financial burden. In 2003, the median starting salary for private practice was \$80,000, while the median starting salary for public interest legal work was \$37,000.⁸ Supporting an LRAP will help law graduates pursue and maintain careers in the public interest field, as well as increase public interest law services by providing a larger source of young, talented lawyers.

What can I do to assist the LRAP process?

Voice your support for an LRAP! Contact: College of Law Dean Glen Weissenberger (ph: 312.362.8088, email: gweissen@depaul.edu); contact University President Reverend Dennis Holtschneider (ph: 312.362.8000, email: dholtsc@depaul.edu); and DePaul Law's SBA officers (ph: 312.362.8025) or stop by 704 Lewis.

¹ See www.finaid.org.

² Available at <http://www.ltf.org/legalneeds.htm>

³ Available at <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/finance/index.php?view=detail&id=1210>

⁴ See <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/finance/index.php?view=detail&id=1210>

⁵ <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/finance/index.php?view=detail&id=6176>

⁶ Available at <http://www.law.uiuc.edu/newsletter/2004-2005/April05.htm>

⁷ Excerpted from <https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/ro/www/LoanRepaymentAssistanceProgram>

⁸ See <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/finance/index.php?view=detail&id=1210>

STUDENTFILE

NAME: **Wynter C.N. Jackson**
YEAR: **3L, DePaul College of Law**
EX-CIR: Black Law Students Association,
Student Bar Association, Public
Interest Law Program Committee
BORN: Joliet, IL

Q: *Where did you receive your undergraduate degree and what was your major?*

I graduated magna cum laude from Illinois State University with a B.S. in Finance.

Q: *Why did you choose DePaul?*

DePaul has a reputation for graduating strong, skilled practitioners who go on to become some of the best attorneys in their respective fields. As a result, I believe that upon graduation (and even now) I will be able to network effectively and obtain a great job.

Q: *What has DePaul done to help you pursue a career in public interest law?*

I have had the opportunity to learn from many DePaul professors. DePaul's faculty is willing to assist students in making their professional and academic goals a reality.

Q: *What did you do last summer?*

I interned at Futterman & Howard, a small civil rights/plaintiff's firm. From that experience, I learned that it is possible to have a rewarding and fulfilling career as a civil rights attorney and still make decent money.

Q: *What did you do this summer?*

I interned at the United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, in Washington, D.C. I work in the Disability Rights Section, which enforces the American with Disabilities Act.

Q: *If someone today asked you what your dream job would be, how would you describe it?*

There are a number of individuals and organizations working on behalf of the public, but many services are disjointed. I would like to perform research on services available for a specific population segment, such as immigrant or African-American women, and look at why organizations that attempt to serve them are not reaching them. Many organizations work to fight poverty, homelessness and domestic violence; I

would like to research these issues in a cohesive manner by looking at how they are connected and thereby affect the women in these populations. I believe that this research can lead to a long-term, permanent solution which would deal directly with the issues instead of providing a band-aid for certain population needs. Society would benefit from a more inclusive and collaborative effort.

Q: *How did you become interested in public interest law?*

I think I have always been interested in public interest law. It's how I knew I did not want to go into Finance after I completed my Finance degree. For me, there are not strict boundaries between public-interest and non-public-interest law areas. There are a variety of ways to contribute to the betterment of society. I believe that many of our community members are not reaping the benefits of the land in which we live; I have an obligation to assist them. For me, that obligation must be accomplished directly as a part of my career. When I recognize injustice, especially when I determine it to be a threat to my freedom or to my community members' freedom, I am obligated to fight against it.

Q: *What advice would you give to someone who is interested in public interest law but does not know how to get started?*

Volunteer! It's the best way to understand the clients you will wish to serve and also determine the public interest law area where you want to make a difference. Most people do not realize how diverse public interest law is.

Q: *What advice would you give to someone who is worried about the low public interest salaries when that person has large loans to repay?*

My advice is: if you do something you love, then money will follow. So ask yourself: do you love it? Many times individuals are all too eager to speak about the lack of income associated with being a public interest attorney. Last summer, during my internship with Futterman & Howard, I was pleased to learn that there *can* be a happy medium.

By the Numbers ...

15	Number of Public Interest Law Certificates granted in 2005 (first year of the Program's existence)
\$90,000+	Average Nationwide Debt Load per student upon Law School Graduation (Source: LSAC.org)
14/41	Number of PILA Stipends granted to '05 summer law interns / Number of '05 summer stipend applicants (stipends range from \$1000-4000)
\$36,656	Average starting salary for a public interest attorney, before taxes (Source: Natl Assoc of Law Placement, 2004)
\$44,022	Average starting salary for lawyers employed by the government (Source: Natl Assoc of Law Placement, 2004)
\$80,000+	Average starting salary for lawyers employed by the private sector (Source: Natl Assoc of Law Placement, 2004)
82/181	Number of ABA Accredited Law Schools with a Loan Repayment Assistance Program / Number of ABA Fully Accredited Law Schools (Source: equaljusticeworks.org, aba.org)

FACULTY FOCUS OTHER NEWS

NAME: Steve Seliger, Esq.
TITLE: Adjunct Faculty at DePaul College of Law
CLASS: Civil Rights Law
JD: Northwestern University School of Law '69

Q: *Could you tell us a little about how you became involved public interest law? Was it something you always wanted to do?*

In college, I was interested in history. I went to law school not really knowing why, but it was always clear that I believed in progressive things. My brother was involved in electoral politics, and I even remember meeting John F. Kennedy once. I didn't like law school at first. But by my 2nd and 3rd year, things were different. For one thing, I realized that I didn't want to work in a big firm. Also, the city was hosting the Democratic National Convention, and so many things were going on – antiwar protests, riots, Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. When I came back to Chicago in the fall of '68, riots had occurred in so many places, including what's now Lincoln Park. Shortly after that, I worked on the Walker Report, which investigated the riots.

Q: *And then after you graduated, did you get a job in the public interest sector?*

My first job out of law school was as a clerk for Federal Court of Appeals Judge Otto Kerner. It was hard to turn down that job. I worked there for two years. During the clerkship, I worked on the appeal for the Chicago Seven. At that point, I felt really involved in public interest work. After that, I got a job with LAF (the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago). I worked there for two years, then left to work at a small progressive law firm, where I primarily represented labor unions. I worked there for about three years.

Q: *When did you start your own firm, and what motivated your decision?*

In 1978, I started my own firm at the encouragement of my wife. She asked me, "What do you have to lose?"

Q: *Can you briefly describe your practice?*

We deal with class action lawsuits in the areas of civil rights and employment. We typically handle 10 to 15 cases at a time.

Q: *What's it like having your own practice?*

There are risks and rewards. There's financial pressure. No one is handing you a regular paycheck. You're responsible for your own income. It's risky and unstable, and it's not for everyone. You have to be highly organized, and when you leave here, you can't take it with you. On the other hand, no one's going to fire you!

Q: *What would you tell law students who are considering public interest jobs, but are worried about the low pay?*

I would say that it's not that important what job you get out of school – just get a job where you learn skills. It's important to learn to be a really good lawyer. Get a job that challenges you, where you can build your skills. Always keep your options open.

Q: *What would you say are "hot" areas of public interest law?*

It's hard to say. Disability discrimination and certain kinds of age discrimination are receiving more and more attention. Also, the institutionalization of the severely disabled – lots can be done there. Another area I see gaining more attention is discrimination of the elderly – the care of older people, and what the government can and should provide.

Q: *Why did you decide to teach? What do you like about teaching at DePaul?*

I had done it years ago when I first started practicing. It was terrible! I thought I'd try it again. I've learned a lot through the process – teaching really challenges you. DePaul has some great students. They're interested, and I've been impressed with their enthusiasm and curiosity.

Q: *What's your favorite piece of advice?*

Take one thing at a time. And keep lists!

PUBLIC INTEREST LEGAL WRITING

Beginning in fall of 2006, 1Ls interested in public interest law have a new opportunity to hone their legal writing skills while exploring career interests. The Legal Analysis Research & Communication (LARC) program will offer a section of first year legal writing with a public interest law focus. LARC already offers specialized sections for students interested in IP, Family Law and Health Law. The Public Interest Law section assignments will be based on facts that have a public interest law focus.

Plans are to have Professor Allison Ortlieb teach the course. Prior to joining DePaul, Professor Ortlieb worked for the Cook County Office of the Public Guardian, representing abused and neglected children in court proceedings then joining the office's appeals division. She has argued before both the Illinois Appellate and Supreme Courts.

VOLUNTEERISM: A WIN-WIN SITUATION

Students can reap rewards while providing local organizations with much-needed assistance. In addition to satisfaction gained from giving back to one's community, students can build a public-service aspect into their resumes. In a competitive job market, the references and experience gained from volunteering can be the distinguishing factor.

Two programs at DePaul College of Law make it easier for students to volunteer. First, the Public Interest Law Program is launching its Community Service Initiative this fall. Through this initiative, interested students can participate in a variety of opportunities with partnering agencies such as First Defense Legal Aid, The Employment Project, Inspiration Corporation, and West Suburban PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter).

Second, the Louise Project for Social Justice offers another avenue for student volunteerism. Louise strives to assist Chicago public high school students with their academic challenges and to expose students to areas of social justice and law through various educational and community-building events. DePaul tutors are paired with Jones College Prep students for an 8-week period.

Calendar ...

Classes Begin	Aug. 20
PILP Reception for 1Ls	Aug. 24
Louise Project Volunteer Meeting, location TBA	Aug. 31
First PILA Meeting, location TBA	Sept. 8
DePaul Law Service Day	Sept. 17
PILI applications begin for 2Ls and 3Ls	Oct. 15
Public Service Employers Reception, Loyola Law School	Oct. 18
Equal Justice Works Annual Conference, Washington, D.C.	Oct. 27-28
PILP Mentor Reception, Rare Book Room	TBA
PILI applications begin for 1Ls	Dec. 1
Exams Begin	Dec. 6

WHO WE ARE

DePaul's 2005-06 Public Interest Law Program Committee Members

FACULTY:

Leonard L. Cavise, Director Andrea Lyon
Jeffrey Shaman Mark Weber

STUDENTS:

Shari Howard, 2L Rebecca Howey, 3L
Wynter Jackson, 3L Shaye Loughlin, 3L
Patty Pizzaro, 2L Teri Ross, 3L
Susan Schmagin, 3L Carmelita Tiu, 2L

For more information about PILP, or if you are a civic-minded professional wishing to join our Board of Directors, please contact Professor Leonard Cavise at 312-362-6841 or at lcavise@depaul.edu.

DEFINING PUBLIC INTEREST

Public interest law serves individuals, groups and social interests that are traditionally subordinated or underserved by our law and government. DePaul's Public Interest Law Program seeks to educate, nurture and inspire those law students who wish to devote themselves to eradicating systemic injustice.

public interest



LAW PROGRAM

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