# Pro Bono: An Emerging Trend
# in American Professional Schools

BY AARON HURST AND JAMIE HARTMAN

**Taproot**
FOUNDATION

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# Table of Contents

## Pro Bono: An Emerging Trend in American Professional Schools

BY AARON HURST AND JAMIE HARTMAN

# Forward

As the leading provider of pro bono professional services to nonprofit organizations, the Taproot Foundation has a vested interest in promoting pro bono service, particularly on behalf of nonprofits. In mid-2008, the Taproot Foundation's research team set out to uncover what professional schools were doing to promote the pro bono ethic in their respective fields. We selected a group of thought leaders from the professional schools of architecture, business, design, and law and interviewed them about the state of pro bono in their disciplines.

We found a field of practice that was rich with innovative approaches and blessed with passionate advocates who share a belief that professional schools have a responsibility to cultivate a pro bono ethic among their students. For example, according to a 2001 survey conducted by the Association of American Law Schools 95 percent of law school deans agreed that "it is an important goal of law schools to instill in students a sense of obligation to perform pro bono work during their later careers."[1] While a formal survey of deans in other fields has yet to be undertaken, the response of law school deans underscores the pivotal role professional schools play in setting the values and standards for various professions. Graduates of professional schools will likely have a dozen or so jobs over the course of their careers, but professional schools are the jumping-off point, the place where students' values are codified—formally, intellectually, and emotionally—before entering their trades.

Despite widespread interest in cultivating a pro bono ethic, we also found that this field of practice is still emerging. There are plenty of outstanding examples out there of what is working. The next steps lay in formalizing and expanding the field.

This paper outlines some of those next steps. We hope it finds an audience among administrators, deans, and faculty members at American professional schools, and we welcome the opportunity to support and strengthen the ties between professional schools, nonprofits, and the public good.

Sincerely,

*Aaron Hurst*
*Taproot Foundation • President and Founder*

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[1] *Handbook on Law School Pro Bono Programs*. http://www.aals.org/probono/probono.pdf. June 2008. The Handbook provides a history and overview of pro bono programs in law schools, a detailed directory of these programs and selected documents from the programs.

# Introduction

As Baby Boomers took leadership roles in our society and Generation X entered the workforce, we witnessed the rise of corporate social responsibility, citizen philanthropy, community service, and social entrepreneurship. Over the past two decades, these trends have taken root on the campuses of professional schools in architecture, business, design, and law, culminating in exciting new programs that engage and inspire students to use their specialized skills to help those who couldn't otherwise afford to pay for professional services.

The primary driver of these trends has been the **demand among students for socially conscious careers.** A career in architecture, business, design, or law may be a lot of things—intellectually challenging, personally invigorating, well-paying—but it is not the end-all, be-all. For those who feel drawn to high-powered jobs and to public service, pro bono work offers the opportunity to live richer, more fulfilling lives by putting their specialized professional skills to work for the greater good. Perhaps more importantly, pro bono work fundamentally changes the identity of the profession and brings a sense of nobility and purpose to the craft.

The second driver of this trend is the recognition among educators that **student pro bono work is good pedagogy.** In the long term, educators view pro bono work as a way to round out professionals' lives in an era of increasing specialization. More immediately, educators also realize that pro bono work offers students practical, real-world experiences they simply can't get inside the classroom.

For [students] who feel drawn to high-powered jobs and to public service, pro bono work offers the opportunity to live richer, more fulfilling lives by putting their specialized professional skills to work for the greater good.

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Examples of pro bono work can be found on most professional school campuses—albeit with different names and points of emphasis depending on the individual school or profession. Consider a few examples:

>> **Auburn University School of Architecture:** In 1993, the School of Architecture at Auburn University established the Rural Studio.[2] Initiated and led by architects Samuel Mockbee and D.K. Ruth, the Rural Studio became a model for the way architecture students of all levels could gain invaluable design and construction (design/build) experience, while also benefiting the rural poor. Each year, the program undertakes a range of residential and civic projects. To date, the Rural Studio has completed nearly 100 projects—including a volunteer fire station, an animal shelter, and scores of family homes—in some of the poorest counties of Alabama.

>> **Tulane Law School:** In 1987, Tulane Law School became the first American law school to institute a comprehensive pro bono program.[3] By 1991, 13 more law schools had launched pro bono programs; of these, six made pro bono work a graduation requirement. Five years later, the American Bar Association mandated that accredited law schools should aspire to instill a pro bono ethic, a guideline that was later codified in a 2005 standard stipulating that accredited institutions "shall offer substantial opportunities for student participation in pro bono activities." Today, out of a total of 200 accredited law schools nationwide, 35 now have mandatory pro bono graduation requirements; 110 have formal voluntary programs; and 24 have independent in-house or collaborative group projects.

>> **Harvard Business School:** Beginning in the early 1990s, student clubs emerged as a center of pro bono engagement within the Harvard Business School.[4] Through the Volunteer Consulting Organization, for instance, teams of student volunteers provide under-funded (typically nonprofit) social service organizations affordable, sound business advice through six-month pro bono consulting engagements. Likewise, the Social Enterprise Club's Board Fellows program trains students on issues of board governance and prepares HBS students, through workshops and quality placements on Boston-area nonprofit boards, for a lifetime of service on nonprofit board leadership.

>> **Art Center College of Design:** In 2001, the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena established "Designmatters," an international initiative that explores the social and humanitarian benefits of design and responsible business. By engaging students and faculty from nearly a dozen design fields, Designmatters focuses on the links between design and issues of social and humanitarian importance in four broad categories: public policy, global healthcare, human sustainable development, and social entrepreneurism. Projects range from public service announcements to print and multimedia campaigns to the design of products and environments.

The models are out there. The challenge now is to connect the dots. This paper outlines some of the steps we believe need to be taken for that to happen. Part One examines the common themes and challenges within and among professional schools and the professions they serve. Part Two highlights some of the best practices for nurturing pro bono work in professional schools. Part Three presents case studies of pro bono programs at various professional schools. Finally, Part Four outlines recommendations to catalyze the movement.

[2] John Cary. Executive Director, Public Architecture. Phone interview. 24 June 2008.

[3] *Handbook on Law School Pro Bono Programs.* http://www.aals.org/probono/probono.pdf. June 2008.

[4] Laura Moon. Director of Social Enterprise Initiative, Harvard Business school. Phone Interview. 25 June 2008.

# Part One—Pro Bono: An Emerging Trend

In talking with representatives of different professional schools, one thing is clear: There is a wide variety of programs and efforts out there that all aim to increase student pro bono service. Despite differences in culture, history, and professional identity among professional schools, we found striking similarities in the stories of pro bono programs evolving at different institutions. Here are the areas of common ground:

## Pro bono has different names but similar content

Perhaps the greatest distinction between pro bono service at different schools and in different professions is the nomenclature. In fact, only law schools have adopted the term "pro bono" as a normative term. (Not surprisingly, the legal profession has the most robust infrastructure to support pro bono work throughout lawyers' careers.) While the terms vary among professions, the key questions and concepts are remarkably similar. Law schools, for example, have "clinics" which are basically the same concept as a "studio" in architecture and design or "field" or "case" work in business schools.

Debates are common in all the schools about the lines between standard volunteer service, curriculum-based projects, pro bono service and paid student work. Should a design student receiving a modest daily stipend for teaching in a low-income high school be subject to the same definition as a team of business school students consulting on a marketing project for a nonprofit organization? Should a design/build project that an architecture student undertakes for course credit be considered pro bono if the client is a low-income family? If the broader goal is to serve the public good, these are the kind of philosophical questions that professional schools share.

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## The Pro Bono Value Proposition

| PRO BONO HELPS STUDENTS | PRO BONO HELPS SCHOOLS |
|---|---|
| ›› Integrate education and practice | ›› Attract the best students |
| ›› Enhance skills | ›› Enhance ties, relationships, and reputation within the local professional community |
| ›› Build relationships with practicing professionals | ›› Demonstrate commitment to local community *(town and gown)* |
| ›› Gain exposure to practice areas | ›› Foster educational mission |
| ›› Enhance resume | ›› Increase opportunities for faculty research and scholars |
| ›› Make education more interesting, relevant, and meaningful | ›› Find alternative ways to satisfy requirements |
| ›› Build leadership skills | ›› Build and strengthen relationships with alumni *(and their giving)* |
| ›› Increase personal fulfillment | |

## Commonly understood benefits

Despite little to no communication between programs (especially across professions) interview respondents shared a remarkably similar understanding of how pro bono service benefits both their institutions and their students.

## Parallel evolutionary paths

When we asked interviewees to describe how their programs evolved, a common trajectory emerged. While there was some deviation, the general path was fairly consistent. In most cases, a handful of entrepreneurial students feel driven to use their skills to help those in need. After a period of time—which varied widely from school to school—student-led efforts snowballed to the point where either the administration and/or faculty felt compelled to become engaged, or the students' work simply caught the eye of a dean or a senior member of the faculty. Either way, the students' ad hoc work undergoes a process of professionalization that multiplies the program's benefit to both students and the school. In most cases, a school will dedicate staff resources, develop formal ties to other school-led efforts, and create a more formal process for sourcing and managing engagements. In a few instances, pro bono service eventually becomes a graduation requirement and a core part of the school's identity.

The schools that were most likely to take the step to invest staff or faculty resources in a program appeared to fit into three groups. The first were schools with traditions of social service or religious ties. The second were land grant schools where service is considered part of the quid pro quo for publicly subsidized education. The final group consists of schools with large endowments and strong alumni giving programs that could support pro bono programs.

While pro bono service enhances and strengthens classroom-based learning, there is also potential for tension between learning objectives and service objectives.

## Balancing educational goals and community outcomes

While pro bono service enhances and strengthens classroom-based learning, there is also potential for tension between learning objectives and service objectives. For example, service tied to a class must be scoped to fit the timeline and subject focus of the course even if that is not the ideal structure for the recipient of these pro bono services. Meanwhile, schools across the professions reported instances where the quality control and management oversight of projects by faculty proved too demanding and the pro bono client's needs were not effectively met.

## Urban vs. college towns

The terrain for pro bono work across fields varies based on the school's setting. Fordham Law School in New York City, for instance, devotes four staff members to its pro bono program.[5] "One of the advantages of being in New York is that there is no shortage of need," says Tom Schoenherr, Assistant Dean of the Public Interest Resource Center at the law school. Students are able to engage in a wide range of projects including: representing victims of domestic violence with Sanctuary for Families, advocating for unemployment insurance benefits for unemployed workers with Unemployment Action Center, and working for the rights of incarcerated individuals with the Prisoners' Rights Unit of The Legal Aid Society." For students who aspire to a career in public-interest law, pro bono work offers a way to gain real-life experience. "There has always been a relatively small market for legal public service jobs," Schoenherr notes. "In most cases, there's more competition for these public service positions than for the private sector legal jobs. Public interest placement depends more on real work experiences. Public interest lawyers aren't so concerned about the school you came from but rather the public-interest related experiences you've had."

By contrast, pro bono programs in smaller cities or rural areas tend to play a larger role in designing and managing the actual content of pro bono projects. In many college towns, for instance, there are few, if any, nonprofit partners to manage pro bono engagements, so schools end up sourcing and managing much of the work. In the field of architecture, for instance, the Rural Studio at Auburn University, the Small Town

[5] Schoenherr, Tom. Assistant Dean of the Public Interest Resource Center, Fordham Law School. Phone interview. 11 June 2008.

> "Growing attention to corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, and not-for-profit management lends itself to the conversation regarding pro bono management work."
>
> **JULIANNE IANNARELLI** ● **Director of Global Research,** *AACSB International*

Center at Mississippi State University, and Community Design Center at the University of Arkansas all originated in, and remain driven by, the universities themselves.

## Points of divergence

While it is clear that these efforts across professional schools have enough in common to merit being called a field, there are some important differences among the professions. First, there are the cultural differences. Julianne Iannarelli, Director of Global Research for AACSB International, notes that business schools are commonly perceived as emphasizing profits and the free market as the most efficient pathway to the greater good.[6] "I can't say that that perspective on business schools is entirely fair or unfair, but there are many who say that business schools themselves have fostered that view." On the other hand, she continues, "There are big discussions within business schools today regarding the role of managers in society. Growing attention to corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, and not-for-profit management lends itself to the conversation regarding pro bono management work."

Second, the licensing requirements that accompany architecture and law confer a different set of professional obligations—and opportunities—that are lacking in business and design. "While some professional fields such as law and medicine require practitioners to have passed a certification exam and to meet certain ongoing expectations, there is no formal licensure process for practicing managers," Iannarelli says. "Similarly, there is also no code which frames 'service' as a professional obligation for managers. This does not mean that business school graduates don't engage in service—in fact, many do—but perhaps their service mindset is not as closely connected to their role as managers as it could be." In a similar vein, the pricing structures of law and business services are typically higher than those for design and architecture services. This means that the market-rate customers in the first two professions can more easily cross subsidize pro bono work. "There is a big ethical difference between being asked to participate in a $50 logo competition, and willingly offering to provide quality community service design." says Laurie Churchman, Assistant Professor of Graphic Design at the University of Pennsylvania. "The $50 competition puts a grossly devalued price tag on the work and profession."[7]

[6] Juliane Ianarelli, Director of Global Research and Dan Leclair, Vice President and Chief Knowledge Officer, Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International. Phone interview. 17 June 2008.

[7] Laurie Chuchman. Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, University of Pennsylvania. Phone Interview. 11 July 2008.

# Part Two— Best Practices: Expanding What Works

In addition to fleshing out common themes and challenges, the Taproot Foundation's research team identified a handful of best practices in this nascent field. While smaller than the list of themes and challenges, these best practices are the building blocks for expanding what works.

## Let students lead—but give them support

Unlike hands-on volunteering, pro bono service requires longer engagements, with structured support systems to vet, manage, and track opportunities. Because of these demands, individual students and student groups often lack the bandwidth and expertise to guide pro bono programs from inception to completion—thus the need for staff support. Yet, staff members can't be the drivers. Just as most student volunteerism has emerged organically from the interests and personal commitments of students, so too must pro bono programs evolve as a response to, and reflection of, students' interests.

On the other hand, as active pro bono volunteers graduate, staff members also have to create a pipeline for engaging new students—and helping them set the agenda. Representatives from Equal Justice Works and Net Impact, organizations committed, respectively, to building the next generation of public interest law and business leaders, underscore this point. As Jeni Izuel, Net Impact's Chief Operating Officer, notes, the most successful Net Impact chapters are student run. Faculty members oversee quality control, and staff support enables students to be engaged. But students have to generate the work or they don't have ownership.

## Devote financial resources and leadership to pro bono

Professional schools with thriving pro bono programs have one thing in common: They give students and staff the resources they need to

Individual students and student groups often lack the bandwidth and expertise to guide pro bono programs—thus the need for staff support. Ideally, students set the programmatic agenda and staff members provide the time and expertise to make it happen.

be successful. Effective professional school pro bono programs nurture symbiotic relationships between the student body and the community service staff who support these programs. Ideally, students set the programmatic agenda and staff members provide the time and expertise to make it happen. Finally, deans and other key administrators devote their time and energy to supporting and expanding pro bono programs.

Meanwhile, funding for pro bono programs comes from a variety of sources—and the strongest have developed multiple streams to support their work. Here are the principal sources of funding:

>> **Alumni funding.** Several schools noted that alumni donations were a major source of funding. When Fordham Law School launched its pro bono program in the late 1980s, for example, the Dean played a major role in building and funding the program. Tom Schoenherr shares, "The Dean at the time took it upon himself to approach alums. The Dean approached 12 alums and asked them to contribute to an endowment for the program." The initial endowment was $1 million, Schoenherr says, but Fordham has continued to tap its alumni network. Other schools reporting vibrant alumni fundraising to support pro bono programs include Duke Law School, the USC Marshall School of Business (see case study), and Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business.

>> **Operating budgets.** Other schools fund student pro bono programs through their operating budgets. Carolyn Woo, Dean of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business, notes that her school had a full-time staff member funded as a line item in the school budget. More commonly, schools fund pro bono work indirectly as faculty assume responsibility for the care and feeding of student-led programs. "When we do a periodic analysis of faculty engagement, we look at different ways they engage," says Laura U. Moon, Director of Harvard Business School's Social Enterprise Initiative. "There is a core group of about eight faculty members who spend a ton of time on this and help drive the overall strategy of the Social Enterprise Initiative. At the next layer, there are 25 members who are quite heavily engaged in a range of activities from teaching in either the MBA program or executive education programs to supervising MBA student field studies to pursuing research in social enterprise-related topics. And then, at the outermost level, there are approximately 80 faculty members engaged in some way."

>> **Grants.** In some cases, schools receive grants to underwrite the impact that their pro bono programs make in surrounding communities. Local foundations have supported the Public Service Fellowship Program at the University of Virginia's School of Architecture, which places students in semester or summer-long fellowships with nonprofit organizations. An endowment supports the Community Service Fellowship Program within the Harvard Graduate School of Design each summer. The number of applicants consistently outpaces the number of available fellowships.

>> **Other funding strategies.** Student fundraising events and reduced-rate (or "low bono") fee-for-service were also cited as common funding strategies.

## Measuring outcomes

Although quality pro bono programs should strive to measure the impact they have, such diligence is still fairly rare even among well-developed programs. Basic client satisfaction assessment tools, like surveys and other simple, data-collection techniques, give pro bono programs a way to evaluate whether they are having their desired impact. With sound data, programs can be more strategic in their engagements as they evolve. Data also give schools an empirical hook for promoting their community involvement. Most importantly, outcome data ensures that the focus of pro bono programs stays where it should: on client satisfaction. As the field grows, developing benchmarking and assessment tools should be top priorities.

## Interdisciplinary approaches

We also found that some of the strongest pro bono programs are the ones that give students opportunities to work outside their academic disciplines.[8] In Baltimore, for example, the Maryland Institute College of Art and Johns Hopkins Medical School have teamed up to create the MICA/JHU Design Collective, which helps disseminate cutting edge public health information throughout some of Baltimore's most marginalized communities (see case study). Likewise, Rutgers University has created projects that bridge the disciplines of law, business, and medicine.

Interdisciplinary projects have a number of salutary effects. Foremost, they broaden students' understanding of issues and deepen their connections to the university as a whole. By working on concrete projects, students get to see how the real world works: they get to see how organizations work, how leaders lead, and how real professionals work cross-functionally. Community partners are better served by interdisciplinary approaches as well, though such programs often require more resources. Finally, by drawing pro bono volunteers from across a university's campus, interdisciplinary programs strengthen ties between students, the university, and the community.

## A need for stronger ties between curriculum and pro bono programs

Students across various disciplines often engage in pro bono work—as part of their formal studies. The idiom varies from profession to profession—"clinic" in law, "studio" in architecture and design, etc.—but the core idea of fusing classroom learning, real-life experience, and public service carries across disciplines. On the other hand, these pedagogical tools rarely extend beyond the classroom. Part of this disconnect has to do with the lack of a formal definition, as noted above; but another part of the disconnect lies in the simple fact that institutions have not taken the formal steps needed to link classroom work to broader pro bono programs. Formalizing and strengthening such connections is something that could be done with a modest investment of money and staff support.

> The idiom varies from profession to profession— but the core idea of fusing classroom learning, real-life experience, and public service carries across disciplines.

[8] Eve Klothen. Assistant Dean for Pro Bono and Public Interest Programs, Rutgers Law School. Phone interview. 17 June 2008.

# Part Three—
# Case Studies:
# Pro Bono in Action

## DESIGN: Improving Health Outcomes Through Good Design

*Maryland Institute College of Art—Baltimore, MD*

Eight years ago, administrators at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) were approached by a team from Johns Hopkins University's Urban Health Institute.[9] Located in one of Baltimore's more underserved communities, the Johns Hopkins Hospital and Health System wanted to develop vehicles for communicating information on relevant public health issues and access to services for area residents. "Hopkins had clear ideas about what needed to be conveyed, but they lacked the right medium for their message," says Ray Allen, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA).

MICA assembled a team of graphic design students who mediated between physicians, public health experts in Hopkins's Urban Health Institute and representatives of the surrounding community. Eventually, the design team created a suite of outreach tools, including print advertisements for buses and t-shirts that touted low-salt diets, exercise, and treatments for high blood pressure.

"The impact of this project has been pretty profound," Allen says. Since then, the partnership has been formalized as the MICA/JHU Design Coalition, which continues to develop effective ways to put the results of Hopkins's public health research to work for the benefit of urban populations. "This has implications beyond the city," Allen continues. "We're on the cutting edge of looking at how the arts and health sciences can work together to change people's behavior."

[9] Ray Allen. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Maryland Institute College of Art. Phone interview. 23 June 2008.

## ARCHITECTURE: Rural Studio's Design/Build for the Rural Poor

*Auburn University—Auburn, AL*

Beginning in the late 1960s, architecture schools, led by Yale, Pratt, and Carnegie Mellon, created scores of community design centers (CDCs) in low-income neighborhoods across the country.[10] Broadly speaking, CDCs carved out distinctive roles such as helping residents of poor and working class communities have a greater say in urban planning, zoning, and land use. More recently, a new generation of architects has sought to establish a more firm link between good design and community service through design/build, in which designers are involved from conception through construction. "Design/build projects are great because students can gain sought-after construction experience while addressing real community needs," explains John Cary, Executive Director of Public Architecture, a nonprofit architecture firm that is also seeking to build formal structure for pro bono work among architects. "However, design/build doesn't necessarily imply or guarantee a social thrust."

One place where design/build has fulfilled its social promise has been at Auburn University's Rural Studio. Co-founded in 1993 by Samuel Mockbee, a high-end residential architect who had grown disenchanted with his usual clients, the Rural Studio designs and builds houses and civic facilities for residents of the surrounding communities. Through Rural Studio, 15-20 second-year students move to Hale County, where they design and build a charity home over the course of a semester. Under the Thesis Program, a dozen students spend their fifth year of school designing and building community projects throughout Hale County.

Although Mockbee passed away in 2001, the Rural Studio remains a vibrant fusion of the pro bono ethic and architecture education. Says Cary, "The Rural Studio lives on and is arguably stronger than ever— better design, more complex projects, and so on. But the strange thing is that very few other architecture schools have attempted a similar program in terms of scale, longevity, etc."

## BUSINESS: Building a Pro Bono Brand

*University of Southern California—Los Angeles, CA*

When Adlai Wertman joined the faculty of the USC Marshall School of Business in 2007, there were four different student consulting groups— and countless informal consulting engagements conducted through classes.[11] In some cases, students organized themselves under the USC brand, but without a mechanism for quality control or communication, administrators saw a potential for problems. "There was all this great energy, but could we guarantee the highest level of service and deliverables?" says Wertman. "So the question was: how do we organize all of this without squelching the student-led pride, while still having quality control and accountability?"

Recognizing that students' enthusiasm for pro bono work represented an opportunity to build the USC brand and institutionalize the pro bono ethic, Wertman formalized and streamlined the school's pro bono programs under the aegis of the Society and Business Lab, a center focused on creating new opportunities for civic engagement by the for-profit sector that was launched in October 2008.

> "There was all this great energy, but could we guarantee the highest level of service and deliverables? How do we organize without squelching the student-led pride, while still having quality control and accountability?"
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> **ADLAI WERTMAN** ● **Professor of Clinical Management and Organization,** *University of Southern California*

[10] Adlai Wertman. Professor of Clinical Management and Organization, University of Southern California. Phone interview. 19 June 2008.

Working with student groups, the Lab created guidelines for the types of projects students would take on. With these in place, Wertman hopes to develop a library of best practices that new groups can use as blueprints for future engagements. The Lab also established contracts for student volunteers and faculty supervisors and a strict liability waiver for clients. "The goal here is to set expectations correctly and ensure that we are delivering on what we promise," Wertman says.

Both the school and the surrounding community have benefitted from the newly formalized program. Goodwill and the United Way are among the largest pro bono clients of USC's program; neighborhood-based tutoring programs are among the smallest. Meanwhile, the Society and Business Lab has attracted strong alumni support. "Alumni find that they get a 'triple hit' from the Lab's work," Wertman says. "They get to participate in community issues in an organized way, exercise philanthropy and volunteerism, and stay connected to their alma mater."

### LAW: Building a Cross-Disciplinary Pro Bono Program to Serve Urban Communities
*Rutgers Law School—Camden, NJ*

A state university in Camden, NJ, the Rutgers-Camden School of Law, has developed an innovative, cross-disciplinary approach to pro bono work. This fall, Rutgers schools of law and medicine will launch a pro bono project aimed at improving medical records and medical translation. Plans are in the works for a project with the business school to assist Camden's poorest residents claim their Earned-Income Tax Credit.

Eve Klothen, Assistant Dean for Pro Bono and Public Interest Programs at Rutgers Law School, attributes the success of the law school's pro bono program to a number of factors.[12] The main driver, she notes, has been student interest. "Our law students are asking for pro bono opportunities, and medical students are likewise seeking volunteer activities," she says. Meanwhile, the City of Camden, one of the poorest cities in the country, has no shortage of opportunities. The legal system is underfunded, Klothen notes, judges are always asking for help, and the economic downturn has created a wave of bankruptcies and foreclosures. "We try to take advantage of structures that are already in place, to plug in as many people and skills as we can."

"[Particularly] as a public university, we see our pro bono work as an opportunity not only to build students' legal skills and learn the pro bono ethic, but also to serve the community," Klothen says. "We want our students to become leaders for pro bono, to do more pro bono work throughout their careers, and to support it financially and politically."

[12] Klothen, Eve. Phone interview. 17 June 2008.

# Part Four—Recommendations: Catalyzing a Pro Bono Movement

The Taproot Foundation believes that professional schools have the opportunity to help a new generation of professionals embrace pro bono work as a lifelong passion, a professional responsibility, and an opportunity for greater satisfaction and learning throughout their careers. A growing body of research underscores the importance of experiential learning, while students are also craving opportunities to remain socially engaged. The challenge lies in helping professional schools to see these broader trends, and to support one another as each institution develops its own pro bono strategy. Here are a handful of recommendations for catalyzing the pro bono movement:

## Adopt pro bono as a field

The principal obstacle to the growth and development of pro bono programs in professional schools is arguably the simple fact that it is not yet recognized as a field. Without accepting all these efforts as being part of a field, it is impossible for advocates of pro bono work to share best practices, develop growth strategies, or effectively market their work to students and other stakeholders. It may take several years to get to a shared definition, but stakeholders should begin by agreeing that pro bono is fundamentally about professionals using their unique skills to help those who can't afford them. This baseline definition can be the starting point for the conscious and consistent branding of these programs as "pro bono programs."

## Make pro bono a professional norm

One of the reasons the pro bono ethic has taken root so firmly in the law profession is the extent to which bodies like the American Bar Association (ABA) and the American Association of Law Schools (AALS) have institutionalized pro bono work at all levels of the profession.[13] In 2001, for instance, just four years after Tulane launched the first administratively supported pro bono program in the country, the AALS published its Handbook on Law School Pro Bono Programs. Likewise, the ABA has gradually raised the bar for accredited law schools. In 1996, the ABA stipulated that accredited schools should offer students opportunities for meaningful pro bono work, and in 2005 made the standard mandatory. The ABA has also encouraged law schools to mandate that firms recruiting on campus outline their pro bono policies, practices, and activities.

Corresponding bodies in the fields of architecture and design—the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the American Institute for Graphic Artists (AIGA)—should play similar roles in their professions. Imagine what would happen if the convening organizations for students (AIAS, Equal Justice Works, Net Impact, et al.), as well as those

> Without accepting all of these efforts as being part of a field, it is impossible for advocates of pro bono work to share best practices, develop growth strategies or effectively market their work.

[13] Melanie Kushnir. Assistant Staff Counsel, American Bar Association Center for Pro Bono. Phone interview. 18 June 2008.

> While individual pro bono programs need to be student-run, the development of the field as a whole will likely be driven by staff members and administrators.

representing faculty and administrators (AALS, ACSA, ABA, AIGI, et al.), dedicated themselves to promoting pro bono programs within and among their respective memberships.

Build communities of practice. One of the paradoxes of developing pro bono programs in professional schools lies in the fact that while individual pro bono programs need to be student-run, the development of the field as a whole will likely be driven by staff members and administrators. As this infrastructure develops, the staff members, faculty members, and administrators responsible for developing pro bono programs will need to build their own communities of practice. These communities should focus on developing models, spreading best practices, and sharing knowledge. Several administrators noted, for instance, that they launched pro bono programs because of their relationships with colleagues at other institutions—not, as one might expect, because of a groundswell of support at their own schools. If those individual, decentralized relationships are the drivers of change, it makes sense to bring more people into the conversations—to weave the strands of individual friendships into a network of relationships between practitioners. As these communities of practice develop, their champions would be wise to partner with their student counterparts, organizations like Equal Justice and Net Impact. Over the years, these groups have helped nurture and support pro bono work across university and college campuses. These organizations are logical partners for building relationships, sharing best practices, and lobbying schools for support.

# Conclusion

Students from all professional schools have valuable skills to offer their communities and society. Those skills and their value only increase over time. Pro bono work uniquely and strategically draws on these skills, benefiting both students and their communities. The immediate return is students becoming engaged in service while in school; the long-term return is that those students internalize pro bono as part of their professional responsibility and carry it with them as they advance in their careers. This trajectory has been borne out in the legal field time and time again: lawyers who attended law schools where pro bono was understood as part of their legal education are far more likely than their peers to continue providing pro bono service for the duration of their careers. To ensure continuity of the pro bono ethic, students and employers alike must understand pro bono as a criterion with bearing on employment choices.

The Taproot Foundation believes that professional schools are near a tipping point. With the right coordination and support, professional schools have the opportunity to create a new generation of professionals who are committed and equipped to use their unique professional skills in service of the public good. Down the road, the Taproot Foundation would like to see all professional schools share the sense of obligation for pro bono service that is endemic among law schools, where 95 percent of deans see cultivating a pro bono ethic as a critical part of lawyers' professional training. Given the social, environmental, and economic challenges we currently face, the time for this to happen is now.

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## About the Taproot Foundation

Nonprofits have the greatest potential for addressing our society's most challenging social and environmental problems, but often lack the operational resources to be effective. The Taproot Foundation exists to close this gap and ensure all nonprofits have the infrastructure they need to thrive. The Taproot Foundation works to engage the business community in pro bono service, building the infrastructure of the nonprofit organizations we rely on to support our communities. This pro bono model leverages the best practices of leading professional services firms to reliably provide high-quality marketing, human resources, strategy management, and technology services at no cost to the nonprofit clients. Over 800 projects, valued at over $33 million, have been awarded to nonprofits to date.