



THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND  
PUBLIC SERVICE LAW CENTER

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024

ALAN B. MORRISON

LERNER FAMILY ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR  
PUBLIC INTEREST & PUBLIC SERVICE LAW



## Annual Report 2024

The 2023-24 academic year brought the activities of the Public Interest Program to new heights for several reasons. Behind it all is the commitment of Dean Dayna Bowen Matthew to expand the program since shortly after she arrived. Her energy and willingness to devote time and money to the program have been vital. One of her innovations was the creation of a Public Interest Advisory Council (PIAC) comprised of fifteen, and about to be twenty-five, alumni with strong public interest experiences and willingness to advance the program with their time and money.



Left to right: Deborah Fleischaker, Marc Fleischaker, Phyllis Fleischaker, Dayna Bowen Matthew.

One of the Council members, Marc Fleischaker, made a multi-year donation that enabled us to hire Anapaula Pérez-Gaitan, who began in the fall of 2022 as the program's coordinator and now is the program manager. She created our exciting [new website](#) and she provides the vital communications to our students for all our events, which we now coordinate fully with the Career

Center. Anapaula also manages the [Richey Fellows](#) program, described below, and handled the logistics for the final three conversations with Retired Justice Stephen Breyer—the whole series is accessible [here](#). David Johnson, who ran our pro bono and pre-orientation programs for more than a dozen years, is now the full-time dean for moot courts and other advocacy programs. Anapaula will take over pro bono duties, and we are exploring the possibility of obtaining a junior associate from a local firm, on a rotational basis, to provide direct supervision for some new pro bono projects we are looking into. In addition to working full time for the program, Anapaula is a part time JD student in the class of 2027, which also means she is closely connected with the needs of the students.

Council dues have allowed us to support some activities for the first time. These include providing travel expenses for graduating students who need to visit their prospective employers; supplementing summer grants for students who have extraordinary travel costs; supporting students for public interest conferences; and splitting the law school's contribution for a post graduate criminal justice fellowship in Alabama, as well as funding two additional summer grants beyond what the law school provides.

On the academic side, for many years, students have been trying to start a public interest law journal, but the cost and many other barriers stood in the way. This year, two students came up with a different concept—the journal will be solely online, have most articles around 5,000 words with many fewer footnotes, and have rapid turnaround—that I supported and helped two of them flesh out. There was significant student interest, largely because of the subject matter, but the proposal came late in the year and got caught up in larger issues of journal politics. The two students, who will graduate before the journal can become a reality, have agreed to bring the idea back this fall and fight for its creation, with my support. In addition, I currently provide general supervision to the year-old student-run [Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Brief](#),

which publishes shorter student written pieces. And working with the Council, we are exploring the creation of a public interest lawyering course.

We are in the process of launching a major fundraising effort for the program. The priorities are permanent endowment for the program manager position; multiplying the number of summer grants from the fewer than 100 we now give; and hiring an attorney to supervise law students in the pro bono projects that the program will create. Other ideas include endowments for post-graduate fellowships and funds to bring in lawyers leaving senior positions in the government or lawyers with extensive public interest careers to teach a class, work on some pet projects, and interact with public interest students for a semester at a time.

### **Program Activities**

In mid-August, as we have done for thirteen years, before the regular law school orientation begins, we convened a three-day Public Interest Orientation in which 90+ incoming students have an opportunity to join like-minded 1Ls, supported by upper-class students who have experienced the orientation before, to visit the local courts and a wide variety of non-profit and government agencies. Last year, this Only-at-GW Law program included visits such as the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, sponsored by [Judge Gregory Maggs](#) (who is a current professor here); a meeting with the counsel to DC Mayor Miriam Bowser to learn about the “colonial” status of the District; a day at the Office of the US Attorney for the District; a meeting with judges from the Office of Administrative Hearings; and community service at Bread for the City.

Eighteen months ago, we recognized that 1Ls, even after orientation, did not have a good sense of what public interest law was all about. In response to this concern, we created “Public Interest Friday,” which is held annually in September. It is a half-day event featuring presentations from the [Financial Aid Office](#) on financing and affording a public interest education and career; the [Career Center](#) on public interest job hunting strategies, timeline, and career

fairs; the [Field Placement Office](#) on public interest externship options; the [Jacob Burns Community Legal Clinics](#) on hands-on public interest and pro bono legal services; a panel of upper-level students; and a panel of diverse practitioners. The event is wrapped up in a reception allowing students to get up-close and personal with the various presenters and panelists, and also includes an opportunity to meet alumni on the advisory council.

We also host regular panel events with practitioners from various fields and settings. Last fall, we sponsored a program about pro bono opportunities at law firms. The panel consisted of three alumni who work at law firms (or a corporation) that encourage their lawyers to do pro bono work, joined by a civil rights lawyer whose organization is a consumer of pro bono services, all of whom are members of our Council. Their messages were that firms are anxious to have associates who want to do pro bono and doing pro bono is a great way to gain experience and have more responsibility. Like Public Interest Friday, this will be a regular part of our schedule going forward.

Other such panel events held this year included a panel of prosecutors from all over the country, a panel of labor and employment law attorneys, a panel of attorneys from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a panel and info session for DC's Public Defender Services, a panel of immigration attorneys (both on the government and the nonprofit side), and more. While panel events and info sessions such as these will occur every year, the subject of those panels will vary and be based on current student interests

### **Related Law School Programs**

For those new to GW Law (and for many who have been here for some time), there is often uncertainty about the relation among the Pro Bono Program, the Clinics, and the Field Placement Program. A short summary explaining how these three parts of the experiential learning fit together, which also contains links that provide further information about each program, is [here](#).

For the past fourteen years, I have chosen five incoming students who receive the designation of Public Interest Scholar, which mainly means that I am their faculty mentor and provide them additional guidance regarding their public interest careers, plus a Supreme Court trip to hear oral arguments without having to stand in line. The five students also receive \$5000 for a summer public interest job after their first year. Students not selected for this program can apply for summer grants through the regular [summer funding application process](#).

We also work with other DC-area law schools each year to put on “DC Alternative Spring Break.” Alternative Spring Break is a program that provides law students with opportunities to engage in hands-on, law-related volunteer work with area organizations during their spring break. Participating in this program is a great way for students to serve the community, gain legal experience, network, and build their pro bono practice.

As an extension of this spring break program, as in prior years, we sent a group of students interested in immigration issues to Laredo, Texas on the Mexican border. There, they toured a detention center where noncitizens are held. They were able to speak with two Russian detainees and compared their version of detention with that of the employees who watched over them. They also visited a pro se asylum clinic where they worked with members of a local nonprofit organization helping migrants applying for asylum, including interviewing clients, helping them formulate their experiences to fit what the Court was looking for, and assist them with filling out the necessary forms.





Five GW Law students standing outside of the CoreCivic Laredo Processing Center.

## **Justice Breyer Comes to the Law School**

Retired Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer and I met many years ago when he was a law professor at Harvard, and we have remained friends ever since. When he announced he was leaving the Court, I asked him to do a series of five conversations here at the Law School and he generously agreed. The series began (with his brother, federal district judge Charles Breyer) focusing on his years growing up in San Francisco, followed in the second session with his time as a student and professor at Harvard. The final three were held this academic year and covered his work for Senator Edward Kennedy, his fourteen years as a judge (and later chief judge) of the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, and finally, his time on the Supreme Court and a discussion of his new book, *Reading the Constitution - Why I Chose Pragmatism, not Textualism*. All five conversations can

be found [here](#). The conversations are being transcribed and should appear on the law school website before too long.



Law School Dean Dayna Bowen Matthew interviewing Retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer.

## Richey Fellows

This was the inaugural year for the [Richey Fellows](#) program, under which we will bring mid-career lawyers who are working for government agencies or non-profit organizations to share their experiences and meet one-on-one with students over three days. The program is funded by the former law clerks and friends of the Hon. Charles R. Richey of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. Richey Fellows are selected from a wide variety of practice areas, including criminal and civil direct legal services, law reform litigation, and public and non-profit regulatory and policy practice. The three lawyers who came this year were Alejandro Ortiz, Senior Staff Attorney for the ACLU Racial Justice Program; Ashley Graham-Watanabe,



Managing Attorney for the DC Neighborhood Legal Services Program (now serving as their Director of Compliance); and Andrew Boyle, Legal Officer at an international tribunal located in the Hague (now serving as Senior Counsel for States United Democracy Center).



Andrew Boyle being interviewed by Manatt/Ahn Professor of International Law Sean D. Murphy on international accountability mechanisms.

The four lawyers who are invited for this coming year are a public defender; a lawyer who has worked at legal aid and is now at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; a civil liberties lawyer focusing on voting issues; and a lawyer from the National Women’s Law Center who specializes in LGBTQ issues. Their names and bios will be posted on the Richey Fellows portion of the website before the start of the Fall 2024 semester.

## Jobs

Because of our location in Washington, many students who come to GW do so because of their interest in working in the Government or for non-profits who interact with various parts of the Government on a regular basis. That is why over **21% of the 2023** graduating class (the last one for which we have data) had federal, state, or local government, or non-profit jobs, not including judicial clerkships (**11%**). Moreover, our students are in a better position than many, not only because being in Washington makes it easier to learn about openings and move quickly, but also because almost five hundred of our students participate annually in externships through the [Field Placement Program](#), which is among the largest of its kind at any law school. Participants in that program gain real world experience, for academic credit, in government and non-profit jobs. What is even more significant is that doing a good job at a Field Placement can be an excellent way to land a permanent position there, or at some other place else where a satisfied supervisor is happy to recommend a student. Starting in mid-March 2020, all our placements were remote, and like most legal jobs today, they are now mainly remote, but partially in an office. This means that our students are able to see what their work environments are actually like and meet in person with real lawyers doing work that interests them.

For many years, there has been public criticism of Congress and the federal agencies for not paying their interns. That changed two years ago for at least some federal agencies and now some non-profits. After a year of studying the change, the Field Placement program now allows students to be paid (and receive academic credit) if they work for a government agency and for most non-profits. We are continuing to examine the impact that pay might have on the learning process, and the school will revisit the issue next year. The change does not apply, and is not likely to apply at GW, to internships in the private sector because there are so many positions available in Washington with non-profit and government offices.

There are three other parts to the jobs function in which we partner with the [Career Center](#). These include (a) informing students about public interest or public service jobs, and why they are worth pursuing; (b) making specific information about specific jobs readily available; and (c) assisting in financing those opportunities and advising students about federal laws that make accepting such positions after graduation much more financially feasible.

Much of the basic information dissemination work used to be done by the Career Center, but increasingly Anapaula is taking on this function. I once again addressed four of the six Inns of Court in a special session on alternative jobs and why students should explore them. We have also arranged to have speakers who will broaden student horizons on the world of public interest law and assist students seeking post-graduate public interest fellowships, as well as the Richey mid-career public interest fellows discussed above.

On the financing side, the federal loan repayment and loan forgiveness programs are a major help to students who wish to take lower paying jobs, with governments, non-profits, or even law firms that serve middle income clients. The basics are described [here](#).

Over the years there have been various efforts to reduce or eliminate the program, which forgives federal loans if the borrower has worked for 10 years in public service jobs, and the Trump budget contained some serious threats to the program, but they did not materialize. The Department of Education is charged with running the loan forgiveness program, but it had done so in what could charitably be called an unenthusiastic manner—and not just under the Trump administration. Finally in October 2021, the Department made major changes in the implementation of the program so that it actually appears that it supports the concept of public service loan forgiveness, instead of fighting it. The Department sought input in advance of those changes, and we submitted comments on behalf of our students emphasizing how important it was for students to be able to know that they would get the loan forgiveness when they

made career decisions, not just when they had repaid their loans for the required 10 years. The Supreme Court stopped the major Biden loan cancellation program, and its smaller version is encountering similar opposition. Nonetheless, we expect that more efforts may be made to augment the loan forgiveness program, and we will be keeping an eye on developments.

The Law School also has a modest [Loan Assistance Repayment Program](#), which is designed to help students who take low paying law-related positions in government service or at public interest organizations with the repayment of their law school debts. In 2019, we undertook a full review of the program and made significant changes, which have made it more transparent, provided objective criteria for granting assistance, and reduced the amount of discretion to assure that like graduates are treated the same. The temporary halt in repayments of student loans enacted by Congress complicated our program, but we continued to help those who have made payments, even if they could have deferred doing so. [Here](#) is how it operates. This is one possible area for alumni donations for the public interest program because all the money goes directly to graduates who are doing public interest work.

Since I arrived at GW, my long-term goal has been to provide funding so that every student would be guaranteed a living wage (adjusted regularly for inflation) for a summer job in a non-profit organization or a government agency. We have a very modest program now that, together with the funding from the student-run Equal Justice Foundation, provides for stipends or tuition remissions for about 90 students a year, far less than the demand. This year all of the students who were selected received \$5,000 or \$6,000 depending on whether they were rising 2Ls or 3Ls. I continue to work with the Dean and the Development Office to bring in additional sponsors for summer grants, and we have added almost ten in recent years. In addition, support from our Advisory Council enabled us to supplement these grants for students who had summer jobs in distant places or whose rent expenses were out of ordinary, generally because they had to keep their local place while living elsewhere. Their support



also added two new grants, the PIAC Grants, which were awarded to [Kevin Vo](#) and [Lauren Taylor](#) this year.

## **Pro Bono**

With the negative impact of the coronavirus on [pro bono](#) work by our students almost finally dissipated, our students were able to engage in significant pro bono work. The graduating class of 2024 volunteered 57,314 pro bono hours submitted by 193 students, an average of almost 297 hours per student. Unlike a number of other schools, those hours include only those for which the student receives neither academic credit nor any form of pay. To put that average in perspective, New York State requires only 50 hours of pro bono work for admission, and it counts hours for which the student receives academic credit or is paid for work at non-profits. Another way to think about this year's accomplishment is to recognize that it is almost nine times the 6,380.5 hours recorded by 64 members of the class of 2011 when the pro bono program began in earnest. We hope to continue to record pro bono hours in this range for the future, as we try to bring on more opportunities for more students. When we can start to do that will depend in part on when the courts reopen in person and the impact that virtual court sessions will have on our ability to find courthouse opportunities.

As a way of thanking students who participate in the Pro Bono Program, GW Law celebrates any student who provides 50 hours or more of pro bono legal services while at the law school in our annual Pro Bono Recognition Ceremony. These students receive the Dean's Certificate of Pro Bono Service, as well as inclusion in the Honors & Awards section of the Commencement Program. GW Law also partners with the GW Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service to recognize students who have submitted 100+ hours with silver graduation cords and the Presidential Volunteer Service Award, which consists of a gold, silver, or bronze lapel pin signifying the number of hours submitted.



Dean Alan B. Morrison and Dean Dayna Bowen Matthew awarding student Kailey Ann McNeal at the annual Pro Bono Recognition Ceremony.

In a city in which there are so many individuals in need of legal services, it should not be difficult to find ways for law students to bridge some of that gap. But it is not easy. Most existing organizations are not set up to take on volunteers for a variety of reasons, some understandable—no space and the student’s lack of a specific commitment to give a significant amount of time—and others less so (it means changing the way things have always been done). Then there is the concern, largely over-stated, that law students might be providing assistance in a way that could be construed as giving legal advice. As a result, while some of our students volunteer at existing organizations (mainly doing intake work), we have built our pro bono program on new ideas and new approaches, as the projects discussed below illustrate.

There are three other ingredients, at least two of which are essential for every successful pro bono project: a committed partner organization, enthusiastic students, and well-thought-out logistics. The best ideas for projects

will go nowhere unless there are willing partners and students who want to carry the ball and bring along others who are not ready for leadership roles. In some cases, such as our original domestic violence assistance project, the idea came from a student, and our role was to make it happen by opening doors and solving problems, which we did until some local court officials thought we were doing too much, even though there were never complaints about the quality of what our students did. In others, such as the probate court project, the idea came from outside the law school, and it succeeded because of stronger support from the Probate Division of the Superior Court, but was stopped when the court went virtual—though it was revived this past spring and will continue again in the 2024-25 academic year.

No matter what the source, the idea can bear fruit only if there are individuals who want to see that the project actually gets done and who can help solve any logistics problems. And on the logistics side, the surest way to kill a project is to have either students or the individuals they are hoping to serve sit around without the other essential components. This past year, the pandemic continued to create barriers for new and existing programs, especially those that were at the Superior Court.

Live pro bono training by legal services providers was reduced during the pandemic, and so two local law schools (American and Georgetown) joined forces with GW to create a shared virtual pro bono training. Indeed, it was the pandemic that gave us ideas for permanent improvements that make it much easier to provide those trainings. Because trainers do not have to go to each campus, they can reach a much larger audience, and their sessions can easily be recorded and shared at multiple institutions. This academic year, the virtual trainings included:

- Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition (CAIR)
- Neighborhood Legal Services Program
- The Veterans Consortium
- The Washington Lawyers' Committee: Workers' Rights Clinic
- The D.C. Superior Court Probate Self-Help Center

It is very hard to create, maintain, and grow pro bono projects because our partners change their priorities, and they find that they can handle the program on their own without our direct assistance. Nonetheless, we continue to send students for pro bono assignments to long term groups such as the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless. In addition, several of our projects - the Bankruptcy Clinic, and the Probate and Landlord-Tenant Projects at the Superior Court - fell victim to Covid because they could no longer serve the public, but this spring the Bankruptcy Clinic and the Probate Project returned. And the project that helped individuals without lawyers in the Family Law Division of the Superior Court has now been incorporated into one of the Law School's clinics.

There is one idea that we hope to advance now that we have an alumni advisory council: encourage our alums in small and mid-size firms to do more pro bono work, by making students available to assist them. That would build on our current work in which we have connected GW law alums to non-profit organizations that need pro bono lawyers. Our successful efforts to persuade the Department of Labor to allow students to volunteer for pro bono work at for profit firms makes this possible, but the challenge remains to connect the student, the lawyer, and the pro bono project.

## **Conclusion**

Under the leadership of Dean Matthew, the public interest program is poised to make major strides in expanding its activities and providing a true public interest community to which students, faculty, and staff are attracted. We are very excited that this will enable the program to go to a new level, and we are eager to make it happen. We have made considerable strides in the past fifteen years, but there is a long way to go in providing more opportunities for our students and in augmenting services to our community. We look forward to continuing to explore new ways to achieve our goals and to make George Washington *the* "public interest law school."

- Alan B. Morrison