

Pro bono – what's in it for students?

The ideals of a Student Law Office give students the fundamental opportunity to experience the expectations of a prospective lawyer, whilst concurrently providing legal advice “for the public good.”¹ As with anything done on a voluntary basis, it can be somewhat uncertain as to what benefits accrue to the volunteer, but alternative opportunities (i.e. a paralegal role within a reputable firm) can be equally uncertain, the reason being that “unqualified advisors require supervision.”² As such resources are scarce and the vast majority of aspiring lawyers are potentially left unaccounted for. According to *LawWorks*³, 70% of law schools in the UK now run student law clinics, a practical concept that accommodates the “vast quantity of forthcoming lawyers that are limited in access to hands-on experience within the field.”⁴

The Advantageous nature of Pro bono to students is recognised internationally; In *Georgetown (U.S)*, Students of Law are expected to perform 50 hours of Pro Bono work on a compulsory basis⁵. Whilst the priority is to provide free legal service to those in poor socio-economic demographics, institutional academics stress that trainee lawyers cannot fully appreciate the prospects of a Lawyer in its absence.

¹ John Cary, *The Power Of Pro Bono* (Metropolis Books 2010).

² 'Pro Bono And Law Students: What's In It For Me?' (*LawCareers.Net*, 2016) <<http://www.lawcareers.net/Information/Features/02112015-Pro-bono-and-law-students-whats-in-it-for-me>> accessed 8 June 2016.

³ Rebecca Parker, 'The Lawworks Law School Pro Bono And Clinics Report 2014' (LexisNexis 2016).

⁴ 'Legal Aid: The Consequences Of LASPO And The Implications Of The Latest Proposed Cuts' (*LawCareers.Net*, 2016) <<http://www.lawcareers.net/Information/Features/09122014-Legal-aid-the-consequences-of-LASPO-and-the-implications-of-the-latest>> accessed 8 June 2016.

⁵ 'New York Bar Pro Bono Admission Requirement — Georgetown Law' (*Law.georgetown.edu*, 2016) <<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/careers/opics/pro-bono/nybar-probono.cfm>> accessed 8 June 2016.

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Law students from the University of Manchester have emphasised that Pro Bono, “offers students the opportunity to gain practical legal experience, foster links to legal professionals, firms and advice agencies, and develop legal skills that aren’t taught in the classroom,”⁶ an attitude that incorporates the most pertinent benefits to the law student. By gaining invaluable experience of real client contact, taking a hands-on approach with legal skills (i.e. Drafting), and developing professional contacts, the student immediately makes themselves more attractive to the potential of a training contract or professional opportunity, thus increasing the likelihood of a successful career.

It is imperative to understand that the benefits of Pro Bono are not limited to professional applications; legal involvement within the community allows one to make meaningful contributions to those in need, and in doing so allows the student to appreciate the “vital role the law plays.”⁷ Legal Service has been denoted as being “unaffordable and out of reach.” The common view held is that “one of the most perplexing facts about our perplexing legal market is its failure to provide affordable services for just about anyone but the rich and corporations.”⁷ Thus, by providing legal aid to those who lack financial stability, the student is able to experience “intrinsic morale”² and self-worth, something that all lawyers must be familiar with, and something that extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

⁶ Rachel Shepard, 'Pro Bono Work | Prospects.Ac.Uk' (*Prospects.ac.uk*, 2016)
<<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate-study/law-qualifications/pro-bono-work>> accessed 8 June 2016.

⁷ Michael Zuckerman, 'Is There Such A Thing As An Affordable Lawyer?' (*The Atlantic*, 2014)
<<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/05/is-there-such-a-thing-as-an-affordable-lawyer/371746/>> accessed 8 June 2016.

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Whist it is apparent that Pro Bono could not exist without a public demand for legal services; it is perhaps as equally apparent that an adequate and sustainable legal service could not exist without the concept of Pro Bono. So when considering the benefits to a student, one can assume that the student is playing a fundamental role in accommodating the “perplexing legal market.”⁷

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