

## News & Reviews

Want free tuition?

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*By Christine Heinrichs*

Two Texas law schools are offering new full-tuition scholarships to law students who promise to bring legal services to the poor.

Most public interest legal jobs pay too little for debt-burdened new law graduates to afford to take. With average salaries at \$36,000 and average debt at \$77,000, the paycheck doesn't cover debt service as well as living expenses like food.

"Everyone knows the problem," said Brad Tobin, dean of Baylor University Law School in Waco. "So many graduate with a meaningful debt load. With legal services salaries at the low end of the pay scale, the math just doesn't work out to cover monthly expenses and the debt service."

Under a new initiative from the Texas Access to Justice Commission, Baylor and the University of Texas Law School in Austin will offer full scholarships to students who commit to at least three years of service at legal aid organizations. UT will offer one to each of its incoming classes in the next three years. Baylor will offer one this year and one in 2007.

It's one aspect of the commission's mandate to improve delivery of legal services to Texas' poor. Currently, only 25 percent of the legal needs of Texas' 3.9 million people who qualify are being met. State funding for legal services has dropped from \$11 million to \$2.9 million this year.

"We've got to get more lawyers on the ground," said James Sales, chairman of the commission and partner at Fulbright & Jaworski's Houston office. "Lawyers have the keys to the courthouse. If people don't have a lawyer, they are denied access to the justice system."

Sales hopes all nine Texas law schools will eventually offer similar scholarships.

"We make no secret that we hope this will be a model for other law schools and law firms," said Tobin. "We are frankly challenging other law schools and law firms to do likewise."

Not all law schools have the endowments that UT and Baylor are fortunate to have to make the scholarships possible. Sales has formed an advisory committee comprised of the deans of all Texas law schools to work on the issue.

UT's scholarships will be offered through the William Wayne Justice Center for Public Interest Law.

"It's a way to involve law schools in the need for graduates to provide civil legal services for the poor," said Eden Harrington, center director.

Sales is spearheading a five-year plan to create an endowment fund, increase corporate support, expand pro bono legal service and engage law schools in legal aid issues. Funds will also go to increasing loan repayment plans, to which the Texas State Bar recently committed \$70,000.

Students gain experience by serving in law school public interest law clinics, serving those unable to pay for legal advice. The needs are far beyond what law school clinics can fill, however.

"We hope that something beyond just these scholarships will occur," said Tobin.

### **Law schools with public interest scholarships**

American, Boston College, California Western, Drake, Georgetown, Golden Gate, Gonzaga, Hofstra, Loyola L.A., Mercer, New York Law School, NYU, Northwestern, Roger Williams, Seton Hall, St. Thomas, Texas Wesleyan, U. Akron, U. Arizona, U. Arkansas, SUNY Buffalo, U. Dayton, U. Illinois, U. Iowa, U. Miami, U. New Mexico, U. Oregon, U. Pittsburgh, USC, Villanova, Whittier

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