



PHOTO BY MARSHA MILLER

Left to right: Whitney Hill, Spencer Wilson, Dean Larry Sager, and Terry Schuster. Class of 2009 graduates Hill, Schuster, and Wilson will begin two-year Justice Corps public-interest law fellowships in fall 2009.

# A FORCE FOR JUSTICE

## THE JUSTICE CORPS FELLOWS PROGRAM FOSTERS A NEW GENERATION OF PUBLIC INTEREST LAWYERS

by **MIKE AGRESTA**

THIS SUMMER, AS NEW LAW School graduates fan out across the country to launch promising careers of all stripes, three Class of 2009 alumni will form the advance guard of a program designed to increase access to legal assistance nationwide while allowing young alumni to gain expertise in public-interest law practice. Spencer Wilson, Whitney Hill, and Terry Schuster are UT Law's first Justice Corps Fellows.

With the philanthropic support of the UT Law faculty; George M. Fleming, '71; and Julius Glickman, '66; the Justice Corps creates post-graduate fellowships that make it possible for young practitioners to address vital and specific needs in communities that otherwise would not benefit from these young lawyers' skills.

"It's extremely difficult to get a public-interest job right out of law school," said

Eden Harrington, Director of the William Wayne Justice Center. "Few nonprofits have the funds to hire someone, and yet there is a tremendous need for practitioners in this area." To address this problem, the Justice Corps program guarantees two years of salary for the fellows at \$50,000 per year. That level of post-graduate support, Harrington said, is extremely rare at other law schools.

Administered by the William Wayne Justice Center for Public Interest Law, the program will also expand the Law School's relationship to the real-world practice of public-interest law.

### **"Forgotten Victims"**

Spencer Wilson, recipient of the Julius Glickman Fellowship in Public Interest Law, discovered his area of professional focus while interning last summer for Bay Area Legal Aid (BayLegal). "I noticed a steady influx of housing clients who were living in foreclosed properties," Wilson said. "BayLegal was able to assist foreclosure tenants with a few of their immediate problems, but it was not able to fully cushion the blow of the foreclosure crisis on these tenants. I realized that tenants were truly the forgotten victims of the foreclosure crisis." This summer, Wilson will join BayLegal's staff to help lead a project protecting tenants' rights after eviction. He will provide direct legal representation as well as work with lending institutions, utility providers, local governments, and housing authorities to provide systemic relief.

Wilson feels confident about representing his clients in court, thanks to experience he gained arguing in front of judges while at the Law School. During his time in Austin, he also found a strong role model for a career in public-interest law: Robert Owen, the director of the Law School's Capital Punishment Clinic.

Further down the road, Wilson expects to use the skills and knowledge he gains at BayLegal to craft policy and legislation to change the way housing works in America. "For years," he said, "the federal government has zealously advocated for homeownership even when homeownership is not the best option for many individuals. Meanwhile, nothing was done to provide safe, affordable housing for renters. We now face a crisis as a result of our myopic approach to housing policy." Through hard work, Wilson believes, that crisis can be resolved.

### **"My Dream Job"**

Whitney Hill, the recipient of the George M. Fleming Fellowship in Health Law, will spend the next two years working with the Juvenile Rights Program (JRP) in Portland, Oregon. "This position would not exist without this fellowship," she said. "I feel extraordinarily lucky to not only have a job,

but have my dream job due to the Fleming Fellowship." At JRP, Hill will work to represent children in cases involving dependency, juvenile justice, and education. Her focus will be advocacy for students with disabilities whose special-education needs are not being met by the schools of the greater Portland area.

Hill worked with special-needs kids for years before coming to Austin, but she points to her involvement with several Austin organizations, all made possible by the Law School, as critical to her development as a professional children's advocate. "Through UT Law's Children's Rights Clinic," she said, "I've become familiar with the dependency system in Texas, as the clinic is appointed by the court to represent children in foster care. While the laws are somewhat different in Oregon, what I've learned from my clinic supervisors Charlie Childress, '74; Leslie Strauch '95; and Lori Duke, '95, will be invaluable." Additionally, Hill credits work experience at Advocacy Inc. of Central Texas, where she was mentored by Lucy Wood, '07, and Ian Spechter, '07, as giving her a solid foundation in special-education advocacy. In her last semester at the Law School, Hill also worked with the Juvenile Justice Clinic. "UT Law has been a perfect fit for me," Hill said, explaining that she came to Austin because of the Law School's ties to the organizations where she eventually worked.

### **"People Were Just Waiting to Do the Right Thing"**

Terry Schuster will also be working for juvenile justice next year, but with different specific aims. Schuster will join the staff of the Juvenile Law Center (JLC) in Philadelphia. The JLC became well-known in legal circles after playing a major role in *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), a U.S. Supreme Court case which, for the first time, declared unconstitutional the use of the death penalty for juvenile offenders. Schuster hopes to get involved in any major cases involving juveniles that come up over the next two years, in addition to contributing his research skills to policy review efforts at JLC.

This is in keeping with Schuster's experience at the Law School, where over the past three years he has played a role in juvenile-justice reform efforts in three large states—Texas, California, and Ohio. In Texas, he said, "One problem we were having was putting kids in isolation. There were kids who had not been outside of their cell in a few hundred days. So I created a memo saying, 'This is not constitutional, and here's why.' This got to the head of the agency, and very quickly the policy changed. I was in a great position to do some legal research and write a quick memo and really see something change, because so many people were just waiting to do the right thing, as soon as they knew what the right thing was." Schuster credits many lawyers from the UT Law community with preparing him for this opportunity, including Professor Michele Dietch, who helped him find the JLC, and James McDermott, '03, a public defender who went out

*"The Justice Corps program will expand UT Law's relationship to the real-world practice of public-interest law."*

of his way to help Schuster improve as a writer. Schuster also has reason to thank the entire Law School faculty—his fellowship is endowed by faculty contributions.

In future years, the Justice Corps program will endow eight two-year fellowships for recent graduates like Wilson, Hill, and Schuster. Harrington and other architects of the program envision an ever-widening community of public-interest lawyers across the country, linked to the Law School through the fellowships that got them started. The result will be a lasting institution that not only works to serve community needs and address policy problems across the United States, but also burnishes the Law School's reputation as a national leader in public-interest law. ✨