

SPOTLIGHT ON TENNESSEE LAW SCHOOLS

This Year at Vanderbilt University Law School...

By Katherine Poulos

Charitable Work

Vanderbilt University Law School students delighted the Nashville community, faculty and staff, and themselves by donating unprecedented amounts of time and money to philanthropic causes this year.

The Vanderbilt Bar Association spearheaded many of the events. First, VBA in conjunction with OutLaw organized AIDS Awareness Week to increase awareness, promote conversation and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in our local, national and global community. The week culminated with over 80 students, faculty, and staff participating in the Nashville AIDS Walk. VULS was the event's third largest fundraiser, raising \$3,129 for Nashville Cares. VBA also organized a book drive to collect books and money for Book'em, a local organization that promotes reading and provides books to underprivileged children throughout Middle Tennessee. VULS donated 4,362 books and \$1,324, the single largest donation Book'em has received during the holiday season. VBA also encouraged over 70 students to take a break from exam studying to create festive holiday greeting cards for senior citizens. The Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and general "Happy Holidays" cards were delivered to Belcourt Terrace Nursing Home. Finally, VBA sponsored a St. Patty's Day party, collecting over \$1,000 in donations that was sent to both the Red Cross and the National Sudanese Center.

In addition to the VBA philanthropic drive, many independent student organizations also held fundraisers and organized community service events. The International Law Society and student Brett Sander organized a pancake-eating competition to raise money to support the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia. Students, faculty and staff donated approximately \$1,100 to help provide free fistula repair surgery to some 1,200 women every year. The Women's Law Student Association held a "mock baby shower" with gifts donated to a local women's shelter. In celebration of Black History Month, the Black Law Student's Association organized students to participate in a Habitat for Humanity building project. The Legal Aid Society's Street Law program provided free legal education programs for community members at nine project sites, including a homeless site, a juvenile site and a women's site. The Legal Aid Society also raised approximately \$76,000 for Public Aid Interest Stipends to fund students' unpaid public interest summer employment. Finally, the Entertainment and Sports Law Society sponsored the Alumni Golf Tournament to raise money for the Tennessee Volunteer Lawyers for Arts.

Special Events

In addition to charitable events, VULS's student organizations sponsored and organized a full year of scholarly programming. The VULS Hyatt Fund helped student organizations bring several high profile speakers to campus. These events included:

- A presentation by Jim Cooney of Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice PLLC on the Duke Lacrosse Case, organized by the Entertainment and Sports Law Society.

- A speech by Mayor Karl Dean (VULS Class of '81), organized by the Legal Aid Society, the American Constitution Society and Vanderbilt Law School Democrats.
- A panel discussion on whether the Gardasil vaccine should be mandated for school-aged children that was sponsored by the Women's Law Student Association.
- "Beyond Scottsboro" a talk organized by the Black Law Student Association and the Social Justice Program.
- A seminar on "Restorative Justice in Action" featuring Marty Price, which was organized by the Student Advisory Board to Social Justice Program, Vanderbilt Bar Association and Student Affairs.
- A presentation on "The Burden of a Gift: Fisk University and the Stieglitz Collection" by John Branham and Stacey Garrett of Bone McAllester Norton PLLC, which was organized by the Vanderbilt Art and Cultural Property Law Association.
- An appearance by Iraqi Judge Zuhair Al-Maliki, who discussed the challenges facing Iraq's new legal system and the promise of establishing the rule of law in Iraq.

Conferences

VULS hosted several important scholarly conferences this past year. In conjunction with the World Intellectual Property Organization, the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers, BMI, ASCAP and SESAC sponsored a major conference to discuss changes to copyright laws, collective rights management practices, and business models capable of meeting the needs of today's rights owners. The conference brought together key players from these and other organizations, including content and services providers, developers of digital technology, lawyers, government officials (including U.S. Register of Copyrights Marybeth Peters) and legal scholars. VULS also sponsored a March symposium in which a distinguished group of scholars, journalists and activists grappled with some of the thorniest issues of immigration. Finally, VULS sponsored a conference on neglected judges. Participating scholars investigated the question of judicial reputation by examining the lives and work of Supreme Court justices who were notable in their own time but who have since received scant attention from scholars, lawyers or current judges.

Wellness Initiative

The Vanderbilt Bar Association, at the initiative of student Meredith Blount, also started an important wellness initiative called "Stress-Free Week," which was timed to correspond with the release of first-semester grades. VBA worked closely with Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program to promote awareness of various emotional, mental and physical health issues stemming from law school and the practice of law; provide outlets and resources to address and reduce the impact of these issues; and find ways to encourage sustainable wellness in the legal community at large. The week included a "dry-pledge" to encourage students to reflect on their drinking behaviors, chair massages to assist in relaxation, and a panel on stress and grades. The program was recognized by the American Bar Association.

Faculty Changes

In August 2007, VULS Professor Robert Covington, a scholar and teacher of employment law who served on the faculty for 46 years, retired from the law school faculty. Additionally, Professor Robert Rasmussen, an 18-year member of the faculty of the VULS, left to take the position of dean of the University of Southern California's Gould School of Law. Other faculty changes included the additions of Brian Fitzpatrick, formerly of New York University School of Law, to the program of law & constitutional theory; Daniel Sharfstein, also formerly of New York University School of Law, to the VULS programs in law & constitutional theory and social justice; Kevin Stack, formerly of Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law of Yeshiva University, to regulatory law and law & constitutional theory programs; and Ingrid Wuerth, formerly of the University of Cincinnati College of Law, to the international legal studies and constitutional law & theory programs.

Academic News

This year, VULS joined nine other law schools throughout the country in a project aimed at improving legal education, which was spearheaded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The deans and two faculty members from each of the participating schools met for the first time in December 2007 to set the project agenda.

The school experienced other exciting academic changes. In the fall, Vanderbilt University and VULS launched a new J.D/Ph.D. program in law and economics. The new program offers a specialized interdisciplinary approach that integrates law and economics within a rigorous curriculum. It is designed for students who wish to pursue careers in universities, research institutions or government. Another exciting change for VULS was its rise in the 2008 US News and World Report law school rankings to number 15.

Vanderbilt University Law School has continued to evolve to better prepare students for the needs and challenges of the legal profession and everyone here is excited to see what the coming years will bring.

Katherine Poulos is a rising 3L at VULS. She will be spending her summer working at Irell & Manella LLP in Los Angeles. Last summer she was a Summer Associate at Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice PLLC in Charlotte and at Smith Moore LLP in Raleigh, N.C. She can be reached at katherine.m.poulos@vanderbilt.edu.