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## UM Law Pro Bono Initiative Receives Statewide Award

Staff Report

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## UM Law Pro Bono Initiative Receives Statewide Award

**Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project honors effort to train law students, assist real-world clients**

 OCTOBER 30, 2020 BY **STAFF REPORT**

**FaTvLiErCcSMPrSt**



Kris Simpson directs the Pro Bono Initiative at the UM School of Law. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – The Pro Bono Initiative at the **University of Mississippi School of Law** is a recipient of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project 2020 Pro Bono Award.

"I am appreciative to MVLP for recognizing the valuable contribution the **Pro Bono Initiative** has made to serving our low-income population," said Judge Jacqueline Mask, of Tupelo, a longtime champion of the program. "This prestigious award is well deserved.

"These law students are a tremendous benefit to our legal clinics and the clients they serve. These students are outstanding young people who will be an asset to the bar and to the citizens of the communities where they choose to live after law school."

Founded in 2011 under the auspices of Debbie Bell, senior faculty at the law school, the initiative is directed by Kris Simpson. As a unique in-house pro bono program, student volunteers attend legal clinics, where they team with attorney volunteers to interview and assist pro se litigants, many of whom could not afford or access legal aid.

In a typical year, PBI attends more than two dozen pro bono clinics throughout the state. COVID has reduced opportunities to meet clients face-to-face while simultaneously, in many instances, making the need for legal services much more acute.

"We're committed to doing all that we can under these extraordinary times," said Susan Duncan, UM law dean. "Not only do Mississippians need the services, but our own law school is committed to inculcating this type of community service in our students."

The American Bar Association encourages all lawyers to provide at least 50 hours of pro bono services each year.

"PBI, however, takes us a step further," Duncan said. "Our students understand that their law obligation is to their communities, too."

Of the many pro bono events, one of the most gratifying has been legal presentations at the Marshall County Correctional Facility. Prisoners are a hidden and difficult-to-access group in need of legal services, and PBI has put on programs involving paternity, parental rights, child custody and support, wills and powers of attorney.

In February 2019, PBI co-hosted a clinic for veterans with North Mississippi Rural Legal Services and the Veterans Justice Outreach Program at the Memphis VA, where lawyers and PBI students assisted veterans with various issues, including consumer protection, estate planning and benefits.

"This is a much-deserved award for the Pro Bono Initiative," said Nicole McLaughlin, executive director of the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission and director of the Access to Justice Initiative of the Mississippi Bar.

"The student volunteers are helping to change the lives of low-income Mississippians by their willingness to give their time and knowledge. PBI's impressive work assists Mississippians statewide and reinforces the duty to the public in these future lawyers."



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OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

Besides providing assistance for Mississippi's underserved population, the clinics also provide valuable practical training for students.

"It's heartbreaking to know that so many low-income families don't have the opportunity to get help, strategy and organization for their cases without these clinics," said Muriel Collins, second-year Ole Miss law student and PBI volunteer from Union. "Each clinic I have attended provides new cases drastically different from the last.

"There are always new strategies to watch and learn from the volunteer attorneys, including the different approaches attorneys use during the client consultation. The clinics provide networking opportunities with local attorneys and court staff as well as enhance my legal knowledge and client communication."



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