We believe lawyers have an obligation to serve.

“Each time a man stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

—Robert F. Kennedy ’51

The Virginia Loan Forgiveness Program helps repay the loans of graduates earning less than $100,000 annually. law.virginia.edu/loanforgive

The Mortimer Caplin Public Service Center provides individual counseling and sponsors events focused on educating students about working in the public sector. Counselors advise and prepare students seeking external summer funding and distinguished postgraduate fellowships such as Skadden and Equal Justice Works fellowships.

Through the Virginia Public Interest Interview Program, students interviewing with public service employers across the country receive funding to defray the costs of travel.
ROBERT F. KENNEDY ’51 FELLOWSHIP

The school’s Kennedy Fellows receive funding to work for any public service employer they choose for the year after graduation.

Fellows receive a $50,000 salary and are eligible for the Virginia Loan Forgiveness Program. Recipients work in legal aid offices, prosecutors’ and public defenders’ offices, government agencies and nonprofit organizations across the country.

Alumni have obtained permanent positions immediately after their fellowships with employers such as the Arlington County Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office, The Bronx Defenders, District of Columbia Attorney General’s Office, National Labor Relations Board, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, Poverty and Race Research Action Council, Santa Barbara District Attorney’s Office, Southern Environmental Law Center, and various U.S. Senate and House committees.

“...particularly accessible...”

“...there are abundant professional and academic support resources here to get you where you want to go...”

VUA Law funds public service fellowships

The school guarantees funding for all students working in public service. In 2023, $178,000 was distributed to 102 students, including $40,000 in year-end fellowships. The school’s Kennedy Fellows receive a $50,000 salary and $50,000 in loan forgiveness. Fellows work in legal aid offices, prosecutors’ and public defenders’ offices, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations across the country.

Columbia Attorney General’s Office, National Labor Relations Board, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, Poverty and Race Research Action Council, Santa Barbara District Attorney’s Office, Southern Environmental Law Center, and various U.S. Senate and House committees.

Next:

POWELL FELLOWSHIP IN LEGAL SERVICES

This two-year fellowship awards a $55,000 yearly salary, benefits and loan forgiveness to a graduating student or judicial law clerk who enhances the delivery of legal services to the poor under the sponsorship of a host public interest organization.

Seeking equal justice

The Law School also supports students seeking postgraduate fellowships.

Ruby Cherian ’23 earned a two-year appointment as an Equal Justice Works fellow at the Equal Justice Works Fellowship, where she will be assisting the civil rights and racial justice unit. Her plan is to continue her work as an attorney for incarcerated people.

Mary Merkel ’23, a former Judicial, Assistant District Attorney, works at the Bronx Defenders, where she assists students in exercising their right to legal representation for incarcerated people.

As the 22nd Powell Fellow in Legal Services, Helen Song ’23 will assist survivors of human trafficking. Working with Justice At Last in Oakland and San Francisco, Song will provide direct legal representation and train pro bono attorneys and community partners.

“A lot of undocumented survivors live with the fear of being deported or experiencing retaliation from their traffickers, so they don’t really reach out for help.” Song said. “They’ll often not realize they have legal rights, and they’ll continue to just live in fear.”
THE LAW SCHOOL fosters a robust public service community.

Virginia has more than 20 student organizations that work in the public interest, help members gain experience and foster a community of servant-leaders.

The Law School has a committed team of career counselors with experience as public interest attorneys who help students achieve their goals. Students also receive support from faculty and alumni mentors.

The annual Shaping Justice Conference and dozens of public service panels and events bring distinguished public service attorneys to UVA Law each year.

THE PRO BONO PROGRAM

The Pro Bono Program is a voluntary program encouraging all students to complete at least 75 hours of pro bono service during their three years of law school. Opportunities are available locally and nationwide. The program also organizes pro bono projects that focus on areas such as child advocacy, immigration law and veterans’ disability claims.

In addition to the many national pro bono opportunities faculty and students explore, the school has strong ties to local legal aid organizations, such as Charlottesville’s nationally recognized Legal Aid Justice Center. The Law School has also partnered with Richmond-based law firm Hunton Andrews Kurth to offer pro bono services to indigent clients in the areas of immigration/asylum and family law. Members of the UVA Law community regularly volunteer, sometimes in joint efforts at legal reform or legal aid. Opportunities to volunteer in regional community service organizations are plentiful.

THE PROGRAM IN LAW AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Founded in 2009, the program provides specialized courses and intensive training to prepare students for careers in public service. Students meet inspiring public interest lawyers from around the country in numerous events designed for fellows, and attend dinners, workshops and social events throughout the year.

PUBLIC SERVICE 2022-23

- $740,005 awarded to 162 students working in public interest jobs during the summer of 2023
- 16,284 pro bono hours logged in 2022-23
- 82 Class of 2023 graduates completed at least 75 hours of pro bono while in law school
- 6,390 hours logged by 197 students at 92 organizations during winter break

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