

# Research Directions

Office of Research Services

## ***Pro bono for the greater good***

**Professor Carolyn Sappideen from the School of Law is exploring the educational, professional and community benefits of a pilot scheme to match volunteer senior law students with community organisations in need of legal assistance, through a Law and Justice Foundation General grant.**



'Performance of pro bono work (legal assistance given free of charge) by students to needy or disadvantaged individuals or groups has been shown to be advantageous in other countries' says Professor Sappideen. In the belief that such schemes have mutual benefits for both the students and the community groups involved, the University of Western Sydney School of Law has piloted a program for its students, (dubbed the Pro Bono Students Australia scheme), as a response to an identified need for pro bono services for members of the greater Western Sydney community. Already, one project has matched a student with a migrant resource centre where the student will research and prepare profiles of human rights abuses in particular countries, which the centre's migration agents can use to assist clients with immigration and refugee status applications.'

In this project, Professor Sappideen is seeking to evaluate the benefits and effects of the Pro Bono Students Australia (PBSA) pilot, with a view to aligning the scheme to the Law and Justice Foundation's major objective of enhancing access to justice for socially and economically disadvantaged people. The PBSA focuses on placement of student volunteers into pro bono projects in areas such as children and young people's issues, housing law, human rights, migration issues, and access to justice for prisoners. Specific placements will enable a range of disadvantaged groups enhanced access to justice, through such activities as research and report preparation for law reform commissions, government bodies and community education organisations. The research will also examine the educational benefits to student volunteers and the effect of pro bono student culture on professional ethics in participating students, as well as the development of professional legal skills.

This research, and the associated PBSA scheme, may ultimately increase the number of lawyers offering pro bono services in areas where need is greatest. It will also provide evidence for the continuation of the PBSA projects. In doing so, the study will contribute to the development of a fair and equitable justice system addressing the legal needs of the community and aims to improve access to justice for all Australians.

**Project Title:** Pro bono students Australia

**Funding has been set at:** \$13,300

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