

Columbia Law School Pro Bono Guidelines

OFFICIAL PRO BONO GUIDELINES

I. GENERAL PREAMBLE

The Columbia Law School faculty determined at its December 18, 1992, as amended at its April 18, 1997 and May 5, 2023 meeting, that:

As a prerequisite for graduation, every student entering as a first-year student during or after the 1993 Autumn term, and every other candidate for a Columbia J.D. degree entering during or after the 1994 Autumn term, must complete 40 hours of qualifying public interest service after the end of her or his first semester of law school. A description of qualifying public interest service may be obtained from the Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs at the Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers. Students for whom this requirement presents a special hardship may bring that fact to the attention of the Assistant Director or the Assistant Director's designee for appropriate action. (Codified as Rule 1.10 in the 2002-03 Law School Bulletin, at page 70).

The Public Interest Activities Committee's October 1992 Memorandum to the Faculty spells out the goals and purposes of the Mandatory Pro Bono Program. These Guidelines establish the standards for the implementation of the Program. For example, they further define "qualifying public interest service," establish procedures for securing pro bono placements and state how the hardship provision will be administered.

The Law School's commitment to the Mandatory Pro Bono Program, as established by Rule 1.10 and as generally described in the Committee's Memorandum, continues strongly to date. The Mandatory Pro Bono Program is currently administered by the Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs at the Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers (PI/PS Office).

II. STANDARD FOR QUALIFYING PUBLIC INTEREST SERVICE

This section provides guidance as to what service will qualify for mandatory pro bono credit at Columbia Law School. (These guidelines do not address any separate state bar requirements. Therefore, projects that qualify under the Mandatory Pro Bono Program may not qualify for state bar admission requirements). Qualifying public interest service consists of uncompensated, law-related, public-interest work performed after the end of the first semester of law school. Details are provided below:

A. Definition of "Uncompensated"

"Uncompensated" means that the student receives neither monetary compensation nor academic or writing credit. The mandatory pro bono service requirement is a separate JD graduation requirement at CLS, and differs from the New York State Bar Pro Bono Requirement. To assure that work credited toward the pro bono service requirement is appropriately distinguished from work receiving compensation or credit, the following rules apply:

1. Service Related to Paid Employment During a Semester: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided to or under the auspices of any individual or organization, provided by a student during any semester in which the student also receives compensation from that individual or organization, may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit only if compensation is provided on an hourly basis and no compensation is received for the services for which pro bono credit is sought.

2. Service Related to Summer Employment: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided by a student to or under the auspices of any individual or organization during the summer may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit even if the student receives compensation from the employer for work performed during that summer, provided that the qualifying service (a) is performed during a week for which the student receives no compensation from the employer; and (b) is in addition to work that the student is expected or required to complete during a period when the student is compensated. In no event shall pro bono service performed during a week or weeks for which the student receives compensation receive mandatory pro bono credit. For example, neither pro bono work done "after regular hours" nor work done on weekends qualifies for pro bono credit, if any compensated work is done during the week for which credit is sought. Rising 3Ls working for public interest employers (defined below) during the summer are exempt from the requirements set forth in (a) and (b) above and may earn mandatory pro bono credit for compensated work performed during the summer. See below for further details:

i) Service Related to a Human Rights Internship: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided by a student to an individual or organization under the auspices of the Columbia Human Rights Internship Program may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit only if the service (a) is performed during a week for which the student receives no compensation; (b) is performed after the first 10 weeks; and (c) is in addition to work that the student is expected or required to complete during the Internship. Rising 3Ls working for public interest employers (defined below) during the summer are exempt from the requirements set forth in (a) and (b) above and may earn mandatory pro bono credit for compensated work performed during a Human Rights Internship during the summer.

ii) Service Related to CSF Summer Employment: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided by a student to an individual or organization under the auspices of the Columbia Summer Funding (CSF) program may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit only if the service (a) is performed during a week for which the student receives no compensation; and (b) is performed after the first 8 weeks of the summer (for rising 2Ls). This includes all CSF-funded work, including judicial internships. Rising 3Ls participating in CSF may earn mandatory pro bono credit for compensated work performed during the summer.

3. Service for a Faculty Member: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided under the auspices of a faculty member may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit only if that service is not performed during any semester in which the student also receives academic credit or compensation for research or other assistance to that faculty member.

4. Service Related to an Externship: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided to or under the auspices of any individual or organization at which the student has worked in a Law School authorized externship program may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit only if that service is not performed during any semester in which the student also receives academic or writing credit for the externship or differs in kind from the work required to receive academic credit.

5. Service Related to a Clinical or Other Course: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided by a student with respect to a matter on which the student works as part of a Columbia Law School clinical course for which the student receives academic credit may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit only if that service (a) is performed during a semester in which the student receives no academic credit for the clinic; or (b) is in addition to and differs from the work expected or required in satisfaction of the clinical course.

6. Service Related to an Independent Supervised Project Under Faculty Supervision: Otherwise qualifying public interest service provided by a student with respect to a matter on which the student works as part of an independent supervised project under faculty supervision for which the student

receives academic credit may qualify for mandatory pro bono credit only if that service (a) is performed during a semester in which the student receives no academic credit for the independent supervised project; or (b) is in addition to and differs from the work expected or required in satisfaction of the independent supervised project.

B. Definition of "Law-related"

1. Organizations and Programs

i) Work for an organization, program or individual that as a substantial part of its activities, delivers legal services or performs other law-related work is presumptively law-related. (NOTE: Students accepting or requesting particular placements are responsible for ensuring that the work they do is in fact law-related, allowing for ancillary administrative and clerical work that may be necessary to the student's law-related work).

ii) Work for an organization, program or individual that is not primarily law-related (e.g., service on the board of directors of a community organization or for a religious organization) qualifies only if the student is working on a specific project which is law-related (e.g., assisting with interpretation of laws or regulations that affect that organization), allowing for ancillary administrative and clerical work that may be necessary to the student's law-related work.

iii) Work for an organization, program or individual that is not primarily law-related will qualify for mandatory pro bono credit if knowledge of the law is helpful to complete the project and the project concerns a topic approved by the Pro Bono Office such as the following:

- Racial injustice;
- Law enforcement reform;
- Access to healthcare;
- Elections (including election monitoring) or census (NOTE: must be non-partisan)
- Engagement with the Harlem community;
- Environmental and climate justice;
- Supporting grassroots and mutual aid organizations; and
- Any additional topics that have been approved by the Pro Bono Office.

Students must be careful not to engage in legal work without adequate legal supervision and should be familiar with ethical guidelines and the rules of professional responsibility concerning the unauthorized practice of law. Students should never represent themselves as attorneys. Students should submit a student-initiated petition to probono@law.columbia.edu prior to beginning the project to determine whether the proposed project and proposed supervisor qualifies under these exceptions. Supervisors must also sign the petition to confirm they understand their and students' responsibilities and expectations.

2. What is not permitted:

Students will not receive credit for involvement in the non-legal work of the entity (e.g., fundraising, clerical work or organizing social activities).

Students will not receive credit for "Get Out the Vote" initiatives or other activities that could be completed by college students where knowledge of the law is not helpful. Students will not receive credit for partisan-related election activities (including political party and political campaign work).

Students will not receive credit for work done with religious organizations or membership agencies (e.g., a credit union, fraternal order, or a cooperative) whose work is primarily for the benefit of the members of such organizations rather than the general public.

C. Supervision Required

i) Otherwise qualifying public interest service at an Established Placement (as defined in Appendix A) or Student-Initiated Placement (as defined in Appendix A) may be assigned mandatory pro bono credit only if it is (a) under the ultimate supervision of a member of a state bar who formally represents the client(s), if any, for whom the work is being performed (or is responsible for the work of the attorney who formally represents them) and (b) under the direct and ongoing supervision of a member of a state bar or an advocate or other person with expertise in the relevant subject matter area, who is responsible for: (i) assigning the particular task to the student; (ii) taking the steps necessary to assure the task's successful completion, including training, oversight, and provision of model forms or other documentation; (iii) conducting an evaluative exit interview with the student; and (iv) evaluating the student's work using the Program's mandatory evaluation form.

ii) Limitation on Legal Work. Students have not been admitted to a state bar and as such cannot represent or provide legal advice to organizations, programs, individuals or their clients. No organization, program, individual or client may rely on a student's work product in taking any actions or forbearing from any actions that may subject the organization, program, individual or client to legal process.

D. Definition of "Public Interest"

i) The scope of public interest service which will qualify for mandatory pro bono credit is non-ideological, broad and includes, among other things:

a. legal services to those without the financial resources to compensate counsel (e.g., indigent individuals; incubator businesses that will improve the economy of a disadvantaged community or an indigent population such as "minority business enterprises");

b. legal services or advocacy aimed at protecting the rights of an individual or individuals in situations raising important public interest concerns and/or important rights belonging to a significant and underrepresented segment of the public such as: legal service groups; organizations that pursue civil rights, civil liberties, voting rights, veterans' rights, victims' rights, reproductive rights, family rights, prisoners' rights, economic justice, environmental protection or other social justice issues; civic, community-based, charitable or religious organizations; cultural organizations; and bar associations;

c. efforts to improve the legal profession or the judicial system, including but not limited to substantive legal work performed in connection with a program presented at the law school;

d. efforts towards eliminating racial injustice and inequalities;

e. efforts towards improving the Harlem community; and

f. efforts to improve public understanding of public interest law.

ii) Qualifying public interest service includes but is not limited to service performed under the auspices of:

a. governments, legislatures and courts;

b. not-for-profit organizations with exemption or qualifications for exemption under sections 501(c)(3) or 501 (c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code;

c. Law School clinics;

d. Law School faculty members engaged in uncompensated public interest endeavors, as distinct from their scholarly work, research or teaching;

e. Student-Directed Organizations (e.g. Spring Break caravans and in-house pro bono projects); and

f. private law firms with respect to their pro bono clients even if the firm ultimately may be compensated through statutorily mandated attorney's fees; legal services for clients who have an obligation to compensate the firm through hourly or contingency fees ordinarily do not qualify as public interest service even if the fees are discounted or will be paid by an entity obligated to provide legal services to the client (e.g., an employer-sponsored legal services plan).

The above examples are intended to illustrate the concept of public interest service for which credit will be given, if it otherwise qualifies. The examples are not intended to be exclusive.

E. Forty Hours

i) Each student must complete 40 hours of qualifying public interest service between the end of their first semester of law school and March 1st of their 3L year, with the exception of participants in spring break caravans and students who have registered spring break pro bono projects with the PI/PS Office. All forms documenting completed hours must be submitted by March 1st of a student's 3L year for May graduates (with the exception of participants in spring break caravans and students who have registered spring break pro bono projects with the PI/PS Office, who must complete forms within 7 days after spring break) and six weeks prior to the scheduled degree conferral date for other graduates.

ii) Qualifying service may be performed at any time after the end of the first semester, including, for example, any semester in residence at the Law School or another law school, any semester in residence at another school that is part of a joint degree program, any vacation and any summer.

iii) Qualifying service may be performed in a segment or segments of any duration acceptable to the relevant placement supervising attorney or placement supervisor, but students are encouraged to complete the requirement in a single semester or summer and a single or small number of segments.

iv) Students shall receive mandatory pro bono credit for qualifying public interest service, training necessary to perform such service, and necessary administrative and clerical work ancillary to the student's law-related work.

v) Time spent commuting to and from the placement shall not qualify for mandatory pro bono credit absent extraordinary circumstances.

vi) No student is under any obligation to accept an assignment requiring more than 40 hours of service. However, students must complete the project and number of hours they have agreed to perform without regard to the 40-hour requirement. If the assignment is not completed, the student shall not receive any credit for service performed at the placement. For example (a) if the agreed-upon assignment specified 60 hours and the student performs only 40 hours of work, the student will not receive any credit; (b) if completion of the agreed-upon assignment specified 20 hours and the student only needs 10 hours more to fulfill the graduation requirement, 20 hours must be completed.

III. STANDARD AND PROCEDURE FOR REGISTRATION AND CREDIT

The PI/PS Office will maintain a clear process for A. finding opportunities, B. applying for opportunities, and C. completing student and supervisor evaluations necessary to receive pro bono credit. The current process is outlined in Appendix A and will be updated as necessary.

IV. STANDARD REGARDING THE HARDSHIP EXEMPTION

A. A student who has a special need for relief from the pro bono requirement shall petition the Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs no later than the end of the student's fifth semester at the Law School. Details about the hardship exemption petition and process will be provided by the Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs upon student request.

B. The Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs, in consultation with the Dean for the PI/PS Office, is authorized to accommodate a student's special needs and, in exceptional circumstances, to waive the requirement entirely.

C. A student who is denied the relief sought may appeal a contested determination to a panel to be appointed by the chairperson of the Public Interest/Public Service Lawyering Committee or the Dean of the Law School and consisting of one student, one faculty member and the Dean of Students.

V. STANDARD REGARDING PETITIONING FOR WAIVER OF REQUIREMENTS

A. Unless otherwise provided in these Guidelines, any student or student organization may file a petition with the Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs seeking to be exempted from any standard set forth in these Guidelines. The Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs will provide a format for such a petition upon request. No such petition shall be granted except for very strong reasons.

B. A student or student organization denied the relief sought may appeal a contested determination to a panel to be appointed by the chairperson of the Public Interest/Public Service Lawyering Committee or the Dean of the Law School and consisting of one student, one faculty member and the Dean of Students.

VI. ADMINISTRATION OF THE MANDATORY PRO BONO REQUIREMENT

Administration of the requirement shall be managed by the PI/PS Office as they see fit. All forms and administrative requirements shall be made readily available to students on the PI/PS Office website and/or LawNet. The PI/PS Office may make non-substantive changes as needed to the administration of the requirement as systems and technology evolve. Current procedures will be outlined in Appendix A and are subject to approval by the Dean for the PI/PS Office.

APPENDIX A (as of 6/28/2023)

APPENDIX A

Overview:

Compliance with the following procedures will help students get the mandatory pro bono placement they want and receive mandatory pro bono credit without difficulty. The PI/PS Office will help students identify and secure placements and otherwise satisfy the requirement, but each student bears the responsibility of their compliance.

Types of Pro Bono Work:

Mandatory pro bono placements may consist of Student-Directed Organization Placements, Established Placements, or Student-Initiated Placements.

A Student-directed Organization Placement is a pro bono placement performed under the auspices of a Law School student organization that has been approved by the PI/PS Office for mandatory pro bono credit.

An Established Placement is a project that has been pre-approved for mandatory pro bono credit and made available to all Law School students, other than a Student-directed Organization Placement.

Student-initiated Placements are pro bono placements initiated by individual students or groups of students for themselves.

The deadlines and remaining procedures are the same for all Placements. All of the Forms required by this section shall be available on-line at: <https://www.law.columbia.edu/careers/public-interest/pro-bono-requirement-and-program>.

I. Registration for 3L work

3L students who are not compliant with pro bono requirements or have not registered a pro bono placement by November 30 of 3L year will be subject to a pro bono add/drop hold. More specifically, during the Spring 3L add/drop period, any 3Ls who have not yet fulfilled the pro bono requirement, registered a pro bono placement or submitted the required documentation will be able to participate in the pre-registration period, but will get a pro bono "hold" on their registration. This means they will not be able to see their schedules or participate in the add/drop period. They will be released from the hold in the following manner:

A. 40 hours of pro bono work completed but forms not submitted: Students who have performed their CLS Pro Bono hours but have not yet completed the required electronic forms are required to complete and submit the required documentation in order to have the hold lifted. More specifically, a student must complete an Exit Questionnaire and request that the supervisor complete a Supervisor's Report (or email the Pro Bono Office confirming the completion of the work) within 30 days of completing the work. Both are available on LawNet. Once the PI/PS Office has reviewed and approved these forms, the PI/PS Office will notify the Registrar and the hold will be lifted promptly.

B. Pro bono work started but not completed: Students who are currently working on a pro bono project or have plans to start one within a few weeks must register their project with the PI/PS Office via an electronic form provided by email from the pro bono program staff. Once filed, the PI/PS Office will notify the registrar and the hold

will be lifted. Once the pro bono project is completed, the student will still need to complete an Exit Questionnaire and have the supervisor complete a Supervisor's Report within 30 days of completing the work in order to obtain pro bono credit.

C. No pro bono work: Students who have not started a pro bono project and have nothing planned must meet with the Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs in order to get the hold removed.

II. Pro Bono Opportunities

A. Established Placements and Student-Directed Organization Placements

i) The PI/PS Office will maintain listings of pro bono opportunities that can be searched according to various search criteria. Students may search these databases, with the assistance of Pro Bono Program staff, to identify a desired Placement.

ii) The Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs will be available to meet with any student requesting assistance in their search.

iii) The student is responsible for contacting the organization directly and providing any necessary materials, such as a resume and cover letter, to the placement in order to secure the pro bono work.

iv) The placement may schedule a meeting with the student prior to commencement of the work. Meetings should allow students and supervisors to come to an agreement about the mandatory pro bono service, including the starting date and the number of hours required. The Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs should be informed promptly about any problems that may arise at the initial meeting or in arranging the initial meeting.

v) If a student receives an offer from a placement, she/he should respond in the manner requested by the placement as soon as possible. Placements may be reassigned if the response is not timely.

B. Student-Initiated Placements

i) An individual student or group of students may petition the PI/PS Office for approval of pro bono service initiated for themselves ("Student-initiated Placement"). Students only need to initiate placements only at organizations that are not Established Placements or Student-Directed Organization Placements.

ii) In order to petition for a new placement, students should submit a Student-Initiated Petition via email to probono@law.columbia.edu for review and approval from the PI/PS Office as soon as possible prior to beginning work at the placement.

III. Documentation of Pro Bono Work

A. Exit Questionnaires And Supervisor's Reports

i) To obtain pro bono credit, students should complete and submit an Exit Questionnaire online via LawNet within 30 days of completing work at a mandatory pro bono placement and must submit it no later than the last day of the semester or summer in which the work was completed. Graduating students shall submit their Exit Questionnaires no later than February 28 of their final semester at the Law School unless their pro bono placement qualifies under an exception. If it does, the Supervisor's

Reports must be submitted no later than the earlier of 7 days following the completion of the project and the last day of upperclass courses of their final semester at the Law School.

ii) The PI/PS Office will make completed Exit Questionnaires available to students inquiring about the Placement. The Program also shall use the Exit Questionnaires to monitor Placements.

iii) Students must have their supervisors submit a Supervisor's Report online via LawNet within 30 days of the completion of a mandatory pro bono placement and must make sure forms are submitted no later than the last day of the semester or summer in which the work was completed. Graduating students shall make sure that their Supervisor's Reports are submitted no later than March 1 of their final semester at the Law School unless their pro bono placement qualifies under an exception. If it does, the Supervisor's Reports must be submitted no later than the earlier of 7 days following the completion of the project and the last day of upperclass courses of their final semester at the Law School.

After filling out an Exit Questionnaire on LawNet, if a student is unable to have their supervisor submit a formal supervisor's report on LawNet due to the supervisor's unavailability, the supervisor (or another employee within the organization) may approve hours by emailing probono@law.columbia.edu with the following information: the name of the student(s) who completed the work, the number of qualifying pro bono hours each student completed, confirmation that the pro bono hours were uncompensated, and a statement that the supervisor is satisfied with the completion of the project and approves the hours submitted through LawNet.

B. Mandatory Pro Bono Credit

i) Once pro bono forms are approved by the PI/PS Office, a student's pro bono hours will immediately appear in their LawNet records and the Registration Services data system. Staff at Registration Services will update 3L transcripts in the month before graduation and all other student transcripts in July.

ii) Each student shall be responsible for informing the Assistant Director of Pro Bono Programs in writing of any disagreement with the mandatory pro bono credit shown on her/his transcript and/or LawNet report.

C. Voluntary Pro Bono Credit

Any pro bono work completed during the first semester of 1L year or in excess of CLS's mandatory 40-hour requirement will be considered voluntary pro bono hours and students should document such hours in the same fashion as indicated in III. A. i. above. While not counting towards the Pro Bono requirement, these hours may count for Bar certification (e.g., in NY) and/or be recognized by the PI/PS Office in other ways.