

Pace Plans 'Legal Residency Program'

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Pace Law School is the latest to announce plans to launch a school-supported law firm geared toward guiding students in their first years of practice.

The Pace Community Law Practice is set to open in September 2012, the school announced earlier this month, and will employ between five and seven recent Pace graduates. The new lawyers will offer low-cost legal assistance in areas including immigration, family and housing law while attending seminars on obtaining and billing clients, malpractice insurance and setting up a law office.

Jennifer Friedman, director of the Public Interest Law Center at Pace, who has been spearheading the project, called the initiative a "legal residency program," similar to a medical residency, "providing intensive supervision and support" for the new attorneys.

Ms. Friedman said the economy, and the poor market for legal services jobs, played a role in the decision to start the project.

"The situation we all find ourselves in with the economy has created multiple serious problems and we feel like we, as a law school, had to find a way to proactively address the problems," said Ms. Friedman, who cited "lack of legal services and challenges facing graduating law students in finding public interest legal work" as the two main, economy-driven problems.

According to Pace's website, only 62.7 percent of the class of 2010, 140 of the 223 students, are employed in positions preferring a J.D. or requiring bar passage.

At least three other law schools have launched similar programs for recent graduates during the last five years, including the City University of New York School of Law, the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law and the University of Maryland School of Law. Ms. Friedman said the Pace program will emphasize training and supervision of young attorneys, regardless of whether they choose to start solo practices.

Fred Rooney, executive director of Incubator for Justice, part of CUNY's Community Legal Resource Network, said CUNY's initiative provides a "cushion" for young attorneys looking to hang out their own shingle.

The program, which began in 2007, currently supports nine attorneys who work out of a central office in Manhattan, where each pays \$500 per month in rent.

The attorneys are paid between \$10,000 and \$13,000 to work as an independent contractor for CUNY, with funding coming from state and local elected officials who tap discretionary funds to support legal services in low-income neighborhoods.

The incubator lawyers are also developing their own practices. CUNY offers support through CLE courses in various areas of the law and also basic business skills.

"Solo attorneys are small business owners," said Mr. Rooney. "To survive they have to develop the skills to create and sustain economically viable practices."

Michele Lampach, who has been in the CUNY program since September, said it provides the training and support she needs to launch a for-profit and a non-profit immigration services organization.

A 2010 CUNY graduate, Ms. Lampach has started the MACV Group, a for-profit organization to help businesses with their employment-based immigration needs. Through professional and personal connections, she said she has gotten a "steady flow of clients."

She said her plan is to make the business profitable enough to support Unlocal, a non-profit immigration legal services entity that she also has launched. Though she is applying for grants to jump-start the non-profit, her goal is to eventually sustain the organization through the hybrid model.

The CUNY program, Ms. Lampach said, has allowed her to "do this in my own way, do immigration work and be an entrepreneur."

Mr. Rooney said he has traveled across the country and around the world advising other law schools, including Pace, on how to replicate the Incubator program.

Ms. Friedman said the focus of the Pace initiative will be to provide "meaningful legal opportunities with excellent supervision to graduates as they take on their first representation of clients," regardless of whether the attorneys aspire to start their own practice.

The attorneys will be classified as fellows and paid by the law school, although compensation levels have not yet been determined, Ms. Friedman said. Their work

likely will be a combination of "low-bono" matters, in which clients pay on a sliding scale based on their income, and grant-funded legal assistance projects, she said. The program expects to begin accepting applications in the spring.

"Based on my conversations with students, there is a lot of excitement about the program and many have inquired about applying," she said.

The program will be housed in space on the law school's White Plains campus, and participants will be able to work there for one or two years.

"Creating this public-interest law practice to serve our community during a time of need, and at the same time utilizing the skills of our extremely capable and socially committed recent graduates, perfectly captures what Pace Law School is all about," said Dean Michelle Simon.

Pace has already raised \$100,000 from David Anthony Pope, president and chief executive officer of the Generoso Pope Foundation, to help launch the community law practice. The school is continuing to raise money for the project.

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