

U of M law students to spend spring break “giving back”



Submitted by [Jeramia Trotter](#), [WMCTV.com](#)

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In an initiative that is unprecedented in scope, students of the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis will host law students from around the country for an “alternative spring break” during the week of March 7 through 11. The students will offer free legal services to elderly and low-income residents of Memphis.

Sponsored by the Public Action Law Society and the law school, the alternative spring break will also give the students the opportunity to work with a number of local non-profit organizations to develop community outreach programs.

Of the 37 students who will participate, 20 are from the U of M. Others are in school at Vanderbilt, Florida State, Loyola Chicago, University of Pittsburgh, University of Tulsa, Campbell University, Gonzaga University, Hamline University and Chase College of Law.

Under the supervision of licensed attorneys, the students will work with clients in three areas – pro se divorce, advance directives, and non-profit advocacy. In the first, they will work with couples seeking an uncontested divorce and who have no children and no joint property in the marriage. The students will help those individuals prepare the legal documents necessary for the divorce proceedings.

The students who will help people with living wills and durable powers of attorney will do so at six sites – Wesley Graceland Gardens, Plough Towers, Parkway Health and Rehabilitation, Memphis Jewish Home, Wesley Highland Terrace and the Ruth Tate House.

Those in the non-profit advocacy will work with Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Literacy Mid-South, and the RISE Foundation. For CASA, they will put together a proposal for the Memphis and Shelby County CASA to start a domestic abuse prevention program. For Literacy Mid-South, they will research the legal issues involved in turning away volunteer tutors based on their criminal history, then propose guidelines for dealing with that occurrence. For the RISE Foundation, they will help prepare for the launch of Bank on Memphis, a community effort designed to encourage people to use banks rather than pay-day lenders or not using a bank at all.

Throughout the week, participating students will also be offered workshops and tutorial sessions in a number of legal subjects. Concluding the week will be a banquet with Memphis Mayor A C Wharton as keynote speaker.

Student organizer Grace Whiting said she is very excited about the project.

“In our meetings and online discussions, it’s been evident that the Alternative Spring Break volunteers are committed and ready to put their legal skills to good use,” she said. “What stood out the most was one student’s saying they wanted to volunteer for Spring Break because they wanted to remember why they came to law school in the first place.

“I feel the same way. It’s easy to lose my sense of purpose when I’m buried under a casebook or working late at school on a research project. When I get the chance to work with a group of highly-motivated students who are committed to addressing the problems of equal access to the court system and really dealing with the issue of poverty and helping at-risk groups, I feel reinvigorated and inspired to keep moving forward. There’s a lot of potential out there to do good, and it’s great to work with people who are ready to serve.”

As Faculty advisor to the Public Action Law Society, law professor Christina Zawisza said, “I am extremely proud of the enormous effort our students have made to organize such an outstanding event. They are truly public service role models who exemplify the highest values of the legal profession.”

This is the second year PALS and the law school have used their spring break time to assist people who need legal help. Last year, 15 U of M students traveled to Miami, at their own expense, after the Haiti earthquake to help Haitians stranded in the U.S. to apply for Temporary Protected Status.

In addition to a number of local lawyers who will supervise the students’ interaction with clients, PALS’ partners include the Memphis Area Legal Services, the Community Legal Center, the Memphis Bar Association, CASA, RISE and Literacy Mid-South.

For more information, call Grace Whiting, PALS president, at 901-652-3862, or PALS faculty advisor, Christina Zawisza, at 901-678-5201.