

The Difference

News and updates from the Pro Bono Program

Taxes, Taxes & more....

The end of the semester brings exams! Yes, unavoidable but what happens after exams?

Winter Break is a great time to reassess your professional identity and look at opportunities to improve skills, explore career options but most importantly it is a time to figure out what you can do to help others.

VITA is all about making sure that low income people get the best refund and have accurate tax returns. For many this is an overwhelming task and they will struggle to find the funds to pay a preparer- to their disadvantage. Why not come to us and have us prepare and eFile their Federal and state tax returns for FREE? The VITA team has a motto; "You Benefit, We Learn".

To be a part of this team you must get certified by the IRS. This involves a self-study course and online test.

Winter Break is the perfect time to get certified to help prepare tax returns for low income clients. Hard copies of resource materials are now available and the online test is up and running. Certified preparers and intake interviewers will start delivering services in Feb. but waiting to the last minute to get certified is not a good idea.

This is very much a team effort. Tax classes are not necessary but being a VITA volunteer certainly helps put a face to a discussion of tax policy. 2021 will be the year

for virtual tax preparation with a key in-person intake interview. Skills, skills, skills!

Contact the Pro Bono Program today! We can connect you to the online test, provide you with information and add you to the team!



Winter Break is also the perfect time to complete your application to become a **Richland County Volunteer Guardian ad Litem**. An online application is available but must be completed before you attend training. Training is also being conducted online! You can make a real difference in the life of an abused or neglected child by being their voice in the wilderness.

Serving as the voice for an abused or neglected child is not for everyone but for those of you who are willing to focus on the best interests of a child, navigate a complex government system, investigate fully and compile the facts needed you could be the one person who makes a real difference in the life of a child.

Contact the Pro Bono Program, we will connect you to the application! or answer your questions!



Family Court is not the only system that utilizes a guardian *ad litem* to protect a vulnerable person. The Probate Court also has guardians *ad litem*!

The Pro Bono Program has partnered with the **Richland County Probate Court** to train and supervise volunteer guardians *ad litem* for alleged incapacitated individuals (aii) in guardianship and conservatorship cases. It may be a person with Down's Syndrome whose guardian has become incapacitated but another family member is willing to step in. It might be a daughter who is caring for her mom with dementia. No matter the incapacity these vulnerable persons need protection and clarity as to what rights they should retain.



This project involves reading a court file, discerning a strategy, interviewing, balancing the needs of the aii and their ability to consent. It takes skill to compile the facts that can support your report on recommendations to the Probate Court judge.

Interested? Contact the Pro Bono Program now. Online training will be set up in Jan.



386° View (blog) <http://probono.scschooloflaw.org>

WEB www.law.sc.edu/probono

TWEN Pro Bono Opportunities

 @USCLawProBono

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 LinkedIn Group

In these unprecedented times, our school is fortunate to have **Ms. Jessica Dandan**, a Ph.D. candidate in Clinical Psychology and instructor, provide counseling services to Law Students and assist them in coping with the challenges of obtaining a legal education. In addition to the stress of law school in general, the transition to online learning has been difficult for students regardless of their year in school.

Omne Bonum was able to sit down with her and discuss her approach to improving Law Student wellness, her background in psychology, and her research interests.

Jessica's most significant influence in her pursuits as a researcher, clinician, and teacher is her belief in the interconnectivity of the physical, mental, and social components of well-being.

“Well-being is a keyword in the WHO definition of health: a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Ms. Dandan's first-impressions:

What is a cold-call? She asked me as I brought up the stress I remembered as a 1L last year. I responded with a detailed description of what all students know too well—the nervous tingle that runs down your spine when you hear your last name called during a lecture. Although I am now a 2L who answers cold calls via Blackboard Collaborate, the fear of them has not faded. The first semester is critical. From Jessica's talks with various student body members, she is

struck by the vital importance of student's first-semester performance. Unfortunately, she also recognizes that students can be thrown into their first semester only realizing just how critical it is until they are in the midst of it. Thus, Jessica employs multiple counseling approaches that she tailors to each student—taking into account lifestyle, values, aspirations, spiritual beliefs, cultural upbringing, socioeconomic status, demographics, gender association, and more when tailoring therapeutic methods to help students during their first semester and beyond.

There is a great need for USC Law to have its own full-time counselor. “I think the Law School is venturing in a laudable endeavor to provide free in-house counseling services to support their students beyond academics, a need was recognized and addressed.” Jessica was fully booked within 3 hours of the school-wide email about her services being broadcast to the student body. Jessica emphasized during the interview that there is stigma in seeking treatment, but by having this broader definition of well-being gives people a better, more holistic way to look at health which includes mental health: it is a balance of all aspects of human life.

Will the counseling services continue to be offered in the future? “First, I would like to thank Dean Hubbard for being fully supportive of the creation of this position. I also want to highlight Dr. Rhea Merck from the psychology department who connected me to the Law School and Dean Palmer, Heather Beatty, Associate Dean Kuo, Pamela Robinson and the many professors who have long been advocating

for student wellness support. This position is also the result of a collaboration with the UofSC Psychology Services Center, Dr. Michelle Burnette, director, Dr. Guillermo Wippold and Dr. Emily Neger, clinical supervisors. Based on my knowledge, several individuals at the Law School are working on securing funding to continue to offer counseling services to Law Students.”

Jessica's Counseling Approach:

Jessica recognizes the stress that the Socratic method form of teaching can bring to students, but as an educator, she appreciates its benefits particularly in the teaching and training of law students.

Jessica employs an integrative therapeutic approach. She mainly uses the Acceptance and Commitment Therapeutic framework, a transdiagnostic approach that provides her with the flexibility to also draw from other theoretical orientations like the Cognitive Behavioral, Dialectical, and Psychodynamic approaches. As an educator and Ph.D. student herself, Jessica can relate well to the difficulties we law students face. Thus, in attempting to reach each student she assists, she likes to use visuals and has whiteboard where she draws things out. She also shared her tendency to explain some neurobiological processes underlying varying problems students may be experiencing, which many have noted as helpful and eye-opening. She emphasized during the interview that she is here to help students whether they necessarily present with mental health symptoms or not.

She feels everyone benefits from different forms of therapy and life coaching and that they do not need to present with impairment to book an appointment. She is here, even if students want to simply discuss their goals, study habits, physical health, or more.

Jessica's research has been focused on the interaction between physical and mental health and how environmental factors impact that relationship. This includes sleep patterns, nutrition, exercise, social interaction, self-care routines, stress management, home environment and more. She spent time working in an in-patient hospital facility and was able to witness first-hand how people can exhibit physical symptoms with no identifiable physical cause. This is why people can get stomach cramps when they are anxious or a headache from stress. Yet, she also noticed how important social support is to wellbeing, treatment and prognosis. In fact, some studies even show that just having a loved one in the room can minimize someone's sensation of pain. Thus, Jessica has dedicated much of her time to studying the intersection of good mental health and its correlation with good physical health, and vice versa. But to also look at how bio-psycho-sociocultural factors in tandem.

Jessica's Tips for Students Struggling to Maintain Focus During Online Learning:

Overall tip: take care of the machine that you depend on i.e., keep a regular sleep schedule, fuel it with nutritious food and be kind to it, it listens to you!

Use an organizational strategy to keep up with tasks, assignments and meetings (e.g., google calendar, weekly calendar, to-do lists)

Take notes while the class is ongoing—engage in active listening and remove tempting distractions

Sitting in bed while studying, attending class or working is not recommended

Create a space dedicated for school work. Find a place where you will feel focused and awake, you brain typically associates bed with sleep, working or attending class in bed sends mixed signals. It can impact both your concentration during the day and sleep quality at night.

Take breaks between class to stretch or go for a walk

Maintain a routine that cues your brain to school, similar to the one you had pre-pandemic (thought it's been a while). Wake up at regular times, engage in your typical morning ritual, get dressed as if you were going to school and sit in your dedicated work space.

Engage in a form of physical activity regularly, mix it up to keep it fun! This is even more important now given the inevitable increase in sedentary activity due to the pandemic and its repercussions. Exercise has many benefits beyond fitness, it helps with sleep quality, mood regulation, stress managements, appetite, metabolism, concentration and more!

Schedule time for social interaction and self-care, call family and friends, engage in activities that are enriching and fulfilling, laugh, treat and reward yourself for your hard work

Reaching out to professors

Use the chat during lecture; people probably have the same question or are lost too

Reach out as soon as you feel you are disconnecting from the material; professors want to help. Though not required, if you would like to hold yourself more accountable and attentive during class, try keeping your camera on (it's also challenging for a professor to teach to black screens...)

Reach out to Fellow Classmates:

Set up virtual meetings if socially distanced in-person meetings are difficult to set up, create collaborative google docs, share notes, maintain a connection with your peers, support and help each other study, and keep each other accountable Utilize peer mentor groups and social networks; you are not alone in feeling overwhelmed. Imposter syndrome is common in graduate school.

Thank you Jessica Dandan!

Interview conducted by Darcy Compton, 2L and Pro Bono Program Board member

For more information about maintaining positive mental health and wellness check out the resources on the **Omne Bonum** portion of the [386° View Blog](#)

Law School Virtual Variety Show

The Pro Bono Program and the Virtual Variety Show team are still accepting submissions for the **Virtual Law School Variety Show!**

If you have a talent, skill, hobby, collection, pets or even activity you want to share...film it and submit to be featured in the show! Once received the submissions will be assembled into a creative online show! Donations will be accepted when you view the **Virtual Variety Show**. Funds raised will be used to provide meals and gifts to the Law School maintenance staff. We want to show our appreciation for all their hard work keeping the building clean especially as we plan to reenter next semester.

Submit a video by the beginning of the spring semester by emailing either Pam Robinson or Michael D. Crump (mcrump@email.sc.edu).

Thanksgiving Gifts- Sharing Joy with Families

On Nov. 23rd a team of volunteer law students delivered 24 bowls of fruit to the families at St. Lawrence Place. Donations from over 16 students made this welcome healthy snack possible.



Palmetto LEADER



The **Palmetto LEADER** is the University of South Carolina School of Law's fully operational mobile law offices.

Why? The Palmetto LEADER will provide legal advocacy and education resources to the rural, underserved populations in SC. This expands the ability of the law school to serve the state while increasing opportunities for law students to gain valuable hands-on experience and skills development.

Who? ...will provide these services? The core service providers will be law students from our Pro Bono Program and Clinical Department working with attorneys from the SC Bar Pro Bono Program.

Where?... will the bus go? Our goal is to reach out to low-income rural communities with limited access to legal services. The Palmetto LEADER is fully equipped with wifi and internet access; increasing the availability of online resources.

How? The Palmetto LEADER has become a reality due to not only a generous donation but also the wisdom of that donor who sought a project that "provided further dimension and depth to the experiences" available to law students.

For more information, news or to sign up to join us:

www.PalmettoLEADER.sc.edu or
<https://palmettoleader.org>

