

Roger Williams University
SCHOOL OF LAW

Pro Bono
Experiential Learning Requirement
Policies and Guidelines

Revised July 31, 2023

What is Pro Bono?

The term pro bono is derived from the Latin phrase, *pro bono publico*, which means “for the public good.” In the legal profession, the term “pro bono” generally means to provide legal services free of charge.

Below is Rule 6.1 of the **American Bar Association's Model Rules of Professional Conduct**, which outlines the obligation of attorneys to engage in pro bono.

Every lawyer has a professional responsibility to provide legal services to those unable to pay. A lawyer should aspire to render at least (50) hours of pro bono publico legal services per year. In fulfilling this responsibility, the lawyer should:

1. *provide a substantial majority of the (50) hours of legal services without fee or expectation of fee to:*
 - 1) *persons of limited means or*
 - 2) *charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters which are designed primarily to address the needs of persons of limited means; and*

2. *provide any additional services through:*
 - 1) *delivery of legal services at no fee or substantially reduced fee to individuals, groups or organizations seeking to secure or protect civil rights, civil liberties or public rights, or charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters in furtherance of their organizational purposes, where the payment of standard legal fees would significantly deplete the organization's economic resources or would be otherwise inappropriate;*
 - 2) *delivery of legal services at a substantially reduced fee to persons of limited means; or*
 - 3) *participation in activities for improving the law, the legal system, or the legal profession.*

In addition, a lawyer should voluntarily contribute financial support to organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means.

RWU Law's Pro Bono Experiential Learning Requirement

RWU Law's Learning Outcome 8: Public Service

Law students will be able to:

- a. Understand the responsibility of lawyers to improve access to the legal system; and*
- b. Understand the professional responsibility to provide pro bono legal service in the law practice.*

RWU Law's Pro Bono Experiential Learning Requirement ("Pro Bono ELR") is designed to instill in law students the value and habit of providing pro bono legal service to low-income communities while also providing students an opportunity to gain valuable practical legal skills. RWU Law's Pro Bono ELR requires every student to undertake 50 hours of pro bono legal service, as defined by ABA Model Rule 6.1, in order to graduate. Law students may not receive compensation or academic credit for their qualifying pro bono service, and the Associate Director must approve placements of Pro Bono Programs.

At RWU Law, pro bono is defined as services provided **without pay or academic credit** in the following categories:

- Legal services to persons of limited means¹ or charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters; which are designed primarily to address the needs of persons of limited means.
- Legal services to individuals, groups, or organizations seeking to secure or protect civil rights, civil liberties, or public rights, or charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters in furtherance of their organizational purposes, where the payment of standard legal fees would significantly deplete the organization's economic resources or would otherwise be inappropriate.
- Activities intended to improve access to the law, the legal system, or the legal profession.
- Any other legal services deemed by the Associate Director of Pro Bono Programs to benefit an underserved community, the state or federal court system, the state or federal government prosecution of criminal defendants, or other practices of law not engaged for economic profit.

¹ Persons of "limited means" are those who qualify for participation in programs funded by the Legal Services Corporation (125% of the federal poverty guidelines) and those whose incomes and financial resources are slightly above the guidelines utilized by such programs but who, nevertheless, cannot afford counsel. See ABA Rule 6.1 Comment 3.

RWU Law's Pro Bono ELR Service Criteria- What Counts and What Doesn't Count²

In order to qualify for RWU Law's Pro Bono ELR, the pro bono service must be:

- law-related;
- with a qualifying organization, agency, or project (see previous page)
- supervised by a licensed attorney or other qualified supervisor, as deemed by the Associate Director of Pro Bono Programs;
- without any compensation (no pay or stipends)³
- not for academic credit; and
- completed while the student is enrolled at the Law School.

A quick look at pro bono service that does count:

- Legal Services organization
- Public Defender
- Government legal service (civil or criminal)
- Public policy work supervised by an attorney
- RWU Law Pro Bono Collaborative Projects, including
 - Alternative Spring Break
 - Eviction Help Desk
 - Street Law
 - Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)
- Pro bono service on matters where your supervising attorney has taken the case on a pro bono basis (not receiving any fee for the case), and you are not getting paid

A quick look at pro bono service that does not count:

- Community service that doesn't utilize your legal training, e.g., Habitat for Humanity construction, serving at a food pantry, etc.
- Providing pro bono service under the supervision of a family member, e.g., mother, father, sibling, aunt, uncle, etc.
- Political campaign work
- Mock trial coaching (unless the school is in a low-income community)

² Please note Students are responsible for reviewing and complying with individual states' bar admissions requirements involving pro bono service. Currently, New York is the only state with a pro bono requirement. Pro bono hours that count toward fulfillment of RWU Law's graduation requirement may or may not count for state bar admission pro bono hours. You must carefully review the bar admissions requirements for each state to make sure your hours qualify. New York's rule, some helpful FAQs, and the New York Affidavit of Compliance can be found at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/attorneys/probono/baradmissionreqs.shtml>.

³ Students may not accept any pay or stipends. In very limited situations, parking reimbursements offered by an employer may be permitted upon the prior approval of the Associate Director of Pro Bono Program, Suzanne Harrington-Steppen. Please contact her directly at sharrington-steppen@rwu.edu.

- Any service that *does not have attorney supervision unless the service has been pre-approved by the Associate Director of Pro Bono*
- Any service or work done for which you receive compensation (including stipends)
- Externship hours or any service or work for which you are *receiving academic credit for the hours*. If you would like to provide pro bono service with an organization or agency where you have externed, **you must wait until the following semester to begin to accrue your hours.**

Tracking and Certifying Your Pro Bono Hours

To receive credit for completion of the 50-Hour Pro Bono ELR, students must complete all required forms online using Etrieve at <https://rwucentral.etrieve.cloud/>.

The following online forms and actions are required:

Law Pro Bono Pre-Approval Request Form 1 (on Etrieve)

- Must be completed and approved by the Feinstein Center **before** beginning your pro bono service.
- Submit the form online and you will receive approval with next-step instructions by email within one week.
- Once approved, start your pro bono service.
 - Be sure that you have informed your supervisor that you are seeking to satisfy RWU Law's Pro Bono Experiential Learning Requirement and that the supervisor will be required to certify your pro bono hours worked and complete a brief Supervisor Evaluation Form.
 - Review any potential conflicts of interest with your supervisor, including past, current, and future employment, internships, externships, clinic enrollment, and/or clerkships.
 - **Start keeping track you your pro bono hours (dates and times).** You must keep documentation of your hours. We suggest using a simple spreadsheet with the date, a general description of the activity, and the total minutes spent on that activity.

Law Pro Bono Completion Certification Form 2 (on Etrieve)

- After you have completed your pro bono service, you must request certification of your pro bono.
- Have your supervisor sign the Supervisor Evaluation Form at the end of your service and complete the Reflective Journal—links to these forms are included in the approval email and can also be found on our website:
- Upload PDFs of your Reflective Journal and the signed Supervisor Evaluation Form when you submit Form 2 via Etrieve.

- The Feinstein Center will review and certify your pro bono hours. You will receive an official email from us confirming that you have met the Pro Bono ELR.

Additional Hours Over the Required 50

- Once students have met the 50-hour Pro Bono ELR, tracking your hours is much simpler—no need for pre-approval or a supervisor form and reflection.

Pro Bono Graduation Recognition (100+ Hours)

- Roger Williams University School of Law values pro bono service as a fundamental part of legal education. The Pro Bono ELR requires all students to complete at least 50 hours of pro bono legal service before graduation. Since many students provide more than 50 hours and work unpaid summers in public interest settings, serving communities most in need, the Law School recognizes all graduating students who have provided 100 or more hours of uncompensated pro bono legal service during law school. Each year in March, all third-year law students are notified about the pro bono graduation recognition and provided with a short application to report their pro bono hours. If you have any questions about RWU Law’s 100-Hour Pro Bono Recognition, please contact Suzanne Harrington-Steppen at sharrington-steppen@rwu.edu.
- Use Form 3 on Etrieve “Additional Hours”.

What Are the Pro Bono ELR Deadlines?

All candidates for the J.D. degree at RWU Law must have completed at least fifty (50) hours of pro bono service and submit the required paperwork documenting their service to graduate.

10 Days Rule: We highly recommend that all students report their pro bono hours within 10 days of completing any pro bono experience.

May Graduation Candidates are required to have completed their pro bono service and submitted the required paperwork documenting their service at least 30 days before graduation.

December Graduation Candidates are required to complete their pro bono service and submit the required paperwork documenting their service at least 30 days before their last exam.