A NEW Social Conscience

By Frederick S. Vondy

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Plague, and its repercussions draw many students into the Law and Health Care Program.

The explosion in the number of homeless people in this country is another problem that couldn’t have been imagined 20 years ago. Now, you can scarcely go three blocks in any direction from the law school without encountering somebody with a cardboard sign, a plastic cup—and often a child in a stroller. To deal with this, food drives are organized on campus, as are neighborhood help programs.

One of the first students I met in my Legal Method section was drawn to the University of Maryland because of its environmental law program. Another came to law school because he wants to maintain a family tradition in the public defender’s office; his counterpart is a student who wants to be a prosecutor—a field that isn’t generally called “public interest” law but that should be, as it also aims at remediating social problems.

But many of us come to law school with the hope of practicing in the most overlooked field of “public interest” law. We want to make the system work efficiently and compassionately for people facing divorces or bankruptcy, for people who want to start businesses or stay out of trouble with the IRS, for people dealing with the death of a near relative or facing a problem at the workplace.

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I’m impressed and inspired by my fellow students. Lawyers and the students today have gotten a lot of bad press, but the fact is that I found more self-servers and opportunists in the news media than I’m encountering among law students. The study of law is proving to be an exhilarating experience, and no small part of it comes from being exposed to the dedication of the students. All the evidence shows that public interest law, no matter how it is defined, is alive and thriving.

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