



Texas A&M University School of Law to Launch Innovative Justice Gap Program
Apprenticeship Network Will Revamp the Traditional First Year After Law School

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Fort Worth, TX, June 23, 2016 – In response to the need to train recent law graduates for solo practice and to help bridge the state’s justice gap, Texas A&M University School of Law is introducing a new incubator program designed to accelerate recent graduates’ transition from law school to solo and small firm practice. This is the first incubator-type program launched in Texas.

The Texas Bar Foundation approved a grant to support the program, formally titled *The Texas Apprenticeship Network: Empowering Solo Practitioners to Help Bridge the Justice Gap*. Since its inception in 1965, the Texas Bar Foundation has awarded more than \$16 million in grants to law-related programs. Supported by members of the State Bar of Texas, The Texas Bar Foundation is the nation’s largest charitably-funded bar foundation.

The Texas Apprenticeship Program will match recent law graduates with practitioners who share the common goal of helping address the state’s growing need for attorneys to assist pro bono and modest means clients. The recent graduates, as apprentices, will work in the offices of solo and small firm attorneys who mentor the apprentices in communities and areas of interest in which the apprentices want to work after admission to law practice. Through this process, the apprentices will obtain experience while learning about practice management. The mentors will also commit to connecting the apprentices in the community.

In addition to learning from their mentors, the apprentices will complete a practicum on law practice management. In the practicum, the apprentices will develop their business plans and tools for their solo practices. The practicum also provides a network for the apprentices and opportunities for innovation. For example, the apprentices may collaborate in developing tools and applications for unbundled legal services.

Professor Susan Fortney, the organizer of the program, stated that the Texas Apprenticeship Network promises to provide high impact at a relatively low cost. “Instead of sending graduates into the profession and trusting that healthy mentorships will develop organically, we’re formally teaming graduates with practice leaders from day one,” Fortney said.

Fortney explained the inspiration for the program as follows: “Above all, we hope that the apprenticeship experience and practicum prepares and inspires the new attorneys to learn how to practice law ethically and provide both pro bono and affordable legal services to clients who cannot afford market rates.”

Texas A&M University is supporting experiential learning initiatives, including the Texas Apprenticeship Network. In addition to providing administrative and personnel assistance, the university has matched the Texas Bar Foundation grant.

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