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UC Law Schools Get \$4.5M for Public Interest Fellowships

Karen Sloan, The National Law Journal

April 13, 2016

The University of California has established a \$4.5 million annual public interest fellowship program open to students and recent graduates at four of its law schools.

University President Janet Napolitano unveiled the program, called the University of California President's Public Service Law Fellowships, Wednesday at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Law.

"It's our hope that by announcing these fellowships on such a large scale, we're sending a message that as a public university with great public law schools and a public service mission, we have not only the legal curriculum but also the financial support for embarking on such a career," Napolitano said in a phone interview on Wednesday.

Although public interest fellowships exist at individual law schools, it is the first such effort to span multiple law campuses. (Washington-based nonprofit Equal Justice Works funds a variety of public interest fellowships open to students and graduates at all law schools, but is not housed at a law school or university.) The funding comes from a discretionary pot of money allocated by Napolitano's office.

"The idea was generated by our four law school deans, and we were talking about what society needs from lawyers right now," Napolitano said. "What I've noticed, particularly with the retirement of baby boomers, is that we need a new infusion of legal talent to go into state government, to go into federal government, to go into nonprofit work. Our students are hungry for it."

Each year, the program will send about 425 law students into public interest summer jobs, for which they will receive between \$4,000 and \$4,500. Another 60 recent graduates will receive \$45,000 to spend a year working in public interest, with an additional \$2,500 to cover costs associated with the bar exam.

Fellowship positions will be divided proportionately based on enrollment at four University of California law schools: UCLA; the University of California, Berkeley School of Law; the University of California, Davis School of Law; and the University of California, Irvine School of Law.

"Public service has long been one of our key missions not only here at the law school, but at UCLA as a whole," said UCLA law dean Jennifer Mnookin. "These fellowships will enhance our

students' opportunities to pursue public interest work and reduce the financial obstacles many face when they pursue public service."

Irvine law dean Erwin Chemerinsky said the fellowships will make the University of California's law schools even more attractive to students who aspire to public interest careers.

The fellowship program will also establish a national conference on public interest law that will rotate among the four law campuses and feature scholarship and discussions on leveraging the law in the public interest.

"I'm a lawyer myself and have spent most of my career in public service," said Napolitano, a former Arizona governor who served as the secretary of Homeland Security from 2009 to 2013. "I know personally the sense of fulfillment you get out of these jobs and the impact you can have."

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