Public Interest Conference proves to be a continued success



This year's conference organizers were: (l. to r.) third-year students Amanda Patterson (panel director) and Heidi Taylor (executive director); second-year students Dylan Nix, Robert Snyder, Nandi Campbell (incoming executive director) and Trent Myers (publicity director); and 2006 Georgia Law alumna Ginny Morris (hospitality director).



Second-year student and conference organizer Nandi Campbell (left) presents Caldwell Chair Milner Ball (J.D. '71) with the inaugural Working in the Public Interest Lifetime Achievement Award.

ften it is hard to follow up a successful premiere, but the law students who organized the Second Annual Working in the Public Interest Law Conference did just that.

The symposium attracted more than 150 lawyers, faculty members and students to the two-day event. Speakers and panelists addressed a variety of issues relating to poverty law such as education, affordable housing, juvenile delinquency, immigration, community economic development, voting rights, workers' rights, health care and indigent defense.

"Although many of this year's topics applied specifically to the Southeast, we took a broader approach to public interest law. We were excited to co-sponsor a panel on education with the State University of New York at Buffalo," conference executive director and third-year law student Heidi M. Taylor said.

The co-sponsored panel focused on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. Other law schools such as Emory University, Georgia State University, Mercer University, the University of Alabama, the University of Florida and the University of Tennessee showed support with their presence at the symposium.

The conference organizers set partnering with other law schools as one goal for this year's event, as well as qualifying panel discussions for CLE credits, both of which were met. Another target was to bring a new

component to the annual symposium – an awards ceremony to recognize outstanding achievement in public interest work.

The inaugural Working in the Public Interest Lifetime Achievement Award was bestowed upon Milner S. Ball (J.D.'71), the holder of the Caldwell Chair in Constitutional Law. Ball has made a tremendous contribution to public interest law at Georgia Law by helping to create the Public Interest Practicum and the Civil Clinic. He also provided needed enthusiasm and support to Working in the Public Interest Conference organizers, according to Taylor.

"The WIPI Board has chosen to name the Lifetime Achievement Award after Professor Ball so that his name will be forever tied to the UGA public interest law conference he inspired," Taylor said.

Cliff Williams, a third-year law student at the Georgia State University College of Law, received the Working in the Public Interest Student Achievement Award for his tireless service at the Georgia Innocence Project. Williams played an integral role in exonerating Pete Williams, who was wrongfully-imprisoned in the 1980s and was incarcerated for more than 20 years in a state prison.

The WIPI Conference opened with a keynote address delivered by Western Circuit Superior Court Judge Steve C. Jones (J.D.'88), the chair of the anti-poverty initiative Partners for a Prosperous Athens.

Attendees participated in nine panel discussions, which provided forums to explore the diversity in public interest work. Stephen Bright, president of the Southern Center for Human Rights, delivered the closing keynote speech that focused on serving the disenfranchised.

Select conference panelists included: Roy E. Barnes (J.D.'72), former governor of Georgia; Jonathan Blazer, public benefits policy attorney for the National Immigration Law Center; Emmet Bondurant (LL.B.'60), member of the Georgia Public Defender Standards Council; Linda Couch, deputy director for the National Low Income Housing Coalition; Ryan King, policy analyst for The Sentencing Project; Michael Monahan, director for the Pro Bono Project for the State Bar of Georgia; and Joel Packer, director of education policy and practice for the National Education Association.

The format of the conference was supplemented by luncheon roundtable discussions. Attendees were able to choose from six areas of public interest ranging from impact litigation and lobbying to government lawyering.

"With each conference, we continue to build relationships with students, professors and practitioners, particularly in the Southeast. We look forward to working with these individuals in planning another great conference next year," Taylor said.

- Compiled by Nikki Girard

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