Climate change focus of annual Red Clay Conference

Can Red Clay Go Green? Adapting Law and Policy in the Face of Climate Change was the topic of the 20th Annual Red Clay Conference, hosted by the University of Georgia School of Law’s Environmental Law Association.

The April conference included panels on topics such as the international climate change regime, the environmental impacts of climate change, how cities and states nationwide are tackling climate change, the potential of an alternative renewable source of energy in Georgia and the Southeast, and new opportunities in the private sector generated by climate change.

“We got really great feedback from all of the participants,” conference organizer and second-year law student Elizabeth Long said. “Climate change is one of the most up and coming areas of law, and I think it is important to do everything we can to advance the knowledge of both the general community and Georgia attorneys.”

The day-long symposium also included keynote speeches by climate change specialist David Hunter, American University assistant professor of law, as well as by David D. Caron, the co-director of the Law of the Sea Institute and University of California at Berkeley Maxeiner Distinguished Professor of Law.

Other panelists were: Georgia Law Woodruff Chair in International Law Daniel M. Bodansky, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy Renewable Energy Coordinator Mary Carr, Athens Mayor Heidi Davison, Georgia Forestry Commission Staff Forester Josh Love and Radical Energy Ventures Founder and President James Marlow.

Sponsored by the ELA, the Red Clay Conference is an annual environmental law event established to increase public awareness of environmental issues of regional, national and international significance through a series of educational presentations and open forum discussions. The conference is entirely student organized and supports the ELA’s mission to advance sound environmental policy, to encourage discussion and to raise awareness among attorneys and lawmakers in Georgia and throughout the Southeast.

Solving poverty through the law

The third annual Working in the Public Interest Law Conference explored practical approaches to solving poverty through the law with notable speakers from across the country, including Yale University’s Steven Wizner and prominent Atlanta attorney and Fulton County Daily Report’s 2007 “Newsmaker of the Year” B.J. Bernstein (J.D. ’87).

The two-day conference covered a variety of issues such as: civil liberties; race and the criminal justice system; decriminalizing mental illness; funding public defender systems; the media’s role in the law; immigration; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth in state-sponsored institutions; environmental justice and women’s reproductive rights.

There was also a moot court exposition on Civil Gideon, which explored whether the Constitution requires a lawyer for poor people in civil cases involving fundamental legal needs, such as shelter.

Key panelists for the various sessions included: Georgia Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anne Elizabeth Barnes (J.D.’83), Southern Poverty Law Center’s Director of the Immigrant Justice Project Mary Bauer, Georgia Public Defender Standards Council Mental Health Advocate Sabrina Rhinehart (J.D.’94) and Southern Center for Human Rights Staff Attorney Gerald R. “Gerry” Weber (J.D.’89).

Wizner, Yale’s Douglas Clinical Professor of Law and supervising attorney, and Bernstein, who specializes in criminal law, delivered the opening and closing keynote addresses, respectively.

Also during the conference, Phyllis J. Holmen, executive director of Georgia Legal Services and member of the American Bar Association’s Presidential Task Force on Access to Civil Justice, was honored with the 2008 WPI Lifetime Achievement Award. Emory University School of Law second-year students Terri Porter and Stephen Weyer were jointly presented with the 2008 WPI Student Achievement Award for their work on the Emory Public Interest Committee Student Board Inspiration Awards.