“The law has incredible power to enable and disable, to protect and punish. The Center for Access to Justice is working to promote a justice system that maximizes people’s ability to use legal tools for good.”

—Darcy Meals, assistant director of the Center for Access to Justice
Kathryn Hamoudah (J.D. ‘20) and Joseph Luna (J.D. ‘19) will serve as the Thomas “Jake” Waldrop (J.D. ’85) interns at the Federal Public Defender’s Office this summer. The internship is awarded to students who exemplify Waldrop’s enthusiasm and dedication to indigent defense.

Congratulations

The center’s Pro Bono Program received the 2018 Carl V. Patton President’s Award for Community Service and Social Justice, which recognizes Georgia State University programs that are making significant contributions to the greater Atlanta community through their outstanding commitment to service. In just its first year, the Pro Bono Program has facilitated more than 700 hours of student pro bono service in partnership with a host of legal services organizations. The award is a testament to our dedicated student volunteers and partner organizations, and we are honored that the Pro Bono Program received this recognition.

Andrew Navratil (J.D. ’18), student director of the Pro Bono Program, was named a National Jurist Law Student of the Year and received the law school’s Public Service Award. Navratil is tireless in his dedication to service, and we are thrilled he earned this well-deserved acknowledgement.

Megan Harrison (J.D. ’18), last year’s Jake Waldrop intern with the Federal Public Defender, received the Michelle Ferguson-Priestley Award, presented to a law student with a record of achievement in criminal law and criminal procedure courses and a demonstrated commitment to community service. Harrison’s enthusiasm and dedication to indigent defense could not be more apparent. As one former supervisor put it, Harrison is “a superhero.”

Serge Luhaga (LLM ’18) received the first Pro Bono Program Award, which recognizes a student for outstanding volunteer legal work through the center’s Pro Bono Program. Luhaga has been a regular volunteer with the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation and the Housing Court Assistance Center. Both organizations enthusiastically supported Luhaga’s receipt of this award, saying he was “an incredible help” and a “tremendous asset,” always serving clients with enthusiasm and “an intellectual curiosity that will serve him well in practice.”
Research for Change

The center’s dedication to empirical research stems from the belief that increased awareness and evidence-based analysis lead to smarter solutions and more lasting change. This semester, the center’s research helped move the ball forward on a number of access to justice issues.

The Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform released its 2018 report and cited to the center’s report on misdemeanor bail reform multiple times. The report quoted center faculty director Lauren Sudeall Lucas as saying “many states engaging in bail reform are forgoing money bail in favor of signature or recognizance bonds, using monetary conditions only as a last resort. In imposing non-monetary conditions, states have emphasized the importance of individual review and a preference that only those conditions necessary to ensure public safety and future court appearances be imposed.” Center fellow Jobena Hill (J.D. ’19) assisted in drafting the center’s report.

The center was selected from a pool of 94 applicants to receive a 2018 Opportunity Grant from the American Bar Endowment, an independent 501(c)(3) public charity. The $24,000 grant will support a pilot study exploring eviction in semi-rural Georgia and how lower-income individuals in those communities experience and interact with dispossessory court—i.e., courts responsible for hearing eviction proceedings. The study will be done in partnership with Georgia State sociology professor Daniel Pasciuti and the Georgia Legal Services Program.

Faculty director Lauren Sudeall Lucas testified before a subcommittee of the Georgia House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee in February regarding HB 768, which pertained to the standard and procedure for determining intellectual disability in capital proceedings. Lucas discussed why Georgia’s standard — requiring defendants to prove their intellectual disability beyond a reasonable doubt to avoid the death penalty — is likely unconstitutional. Georgia is the only state in the country with that stringent a requirement, as Lucas wrote about in “An Empirical Assessment of Georgia’s Beyond a Reasonable Doubt Standard to Determine Intellectual Disability in Capital Cases,” published in the Georgia State University Law Review. Center fellow Jobena Hill (J.D. ’19) was instrumental in conducting the research for this paper.

WELCOME to the center’s newest law faculty members, Ted Afield, Nicole Iannarone and Tameka Lester.
Spring into Service

One of the cornerstones of the Pro Bono Program is Alternative Spring Break (“ASB”), which allows students to immerse themselves in a substantive legal area while engaging in related pro bono service. For the second year in a row, ASB received more applications than available spots.

One group spent the week in Lumpkin, Georgia, working with the Southern Poverty Law Center (“SPLC”) to represent detained immigrants in Stewart Detention Center. Few detainees have counsel at Stewart, but those with representation are ten times as likely to obtain relief. Under the supervision of attorneys from SPLC, the students attended immigration court, interviewed detained clients, drafted motions, and gathered supporting evidence.

Christine Rodriguez (J.D. ’20) said, “where detainees so clearly felt hopelessly lost within the system, I will never forget the way their faces lit up when they realized we were going to help them.” Added trip leader Stephen Swanson (J.D. ’20), “ASB was a great opportunity to apply what I’ve learned in the classroom for the benefit of an underserved immigrant detainee population.”

Another group of ASB students stayed in Atlanta and partnered with the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation and Truancy Intervention Project, representing clients in housing conditions and eviction cases, and learning about the impact that housing instability can have on education. The group visited three elementary schools in the Atlanta Public School system, volunteered with the Boys and Girls Club, and observed dispossessionary and juvenile court in Fulton County. Garrett Groos (J.D. ’20) said of the week, “I’ve done service my whole life, but this was my first peek into the impact a lawyer can have.” Emily Gaston (J.D. ’20) added, “I went to law school to problem solve, and this trip allowed me to see how much I’ve learned after the tunnel vision of 1L year. It’s a privilege to use that knowledge to help people.”

“ASB is one of the core components of our Pro Bono Program and for good reason. In just one week, students see firsthand the power law can have, for better and for worse, and they realize their own ability to make a concrete difference.” — Darcy Meals, assistant director
Dialogue that Makes a Difference

The Center for Access to Justice hosts an annual conference that brings together scholars and practitioners from across the Southeast to discuss a timely topic in access to justice. This year’s inaugural State of the South conference, held in February, focused on the intersection between the civil and criminal justice systems and how practitioners in either sphere might bridge the civil-criminal divide. We hosted panelists from across the Southeast, with more than 130 registrants for the conference and 90 R.S.V.P.s for the opening reception – with attendees hailing from 12 states. The recorded panels are available at law.gsu.edu/A2J/state-of-the-south-conference.

Our sincere thanks to our generous sponsors, Red Beard Restaurants, and our conference partner, the ABA’s Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants. We’re already looking forward to next year’s State of the South!

The center’s Bridges series provides a forum for academics writing about access to justice to connect with an interdisciplinary group of scholars and relevant practitioners, fostering a closer connection between academic scholarship and real-world practice. In March, center faculty member Ted Afield, associate clinical professor and director of the Philip C. Cook Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, led the first of our Bridges conversations, presenting on the social justice impact of representing low-income taxpayers. Following his remarks, Afield engaged in a rich dialogue with a group of commenters that included in-house tax counsel, law professors, students, and a representative from the Internal Revenue Service’s Taxpayer Advocate Service. Contact us to participate in a Bridges discussion as an academic presenter or a practitioner-commenter.
Support the Center and Join Our Listserv

Your support makes it possible for the center to continue to engage in these critical discussions and research projects and to provide meaningful opportunities to the next generation of lawyers. Follow us on Twitter (@CenterA2J) and visit law.gsu.edu/A2J to join our listserv, and click “Support the Center” to make a financial contribution. Thank you for your continued interest and involvement in the center’s work!

Lauren Sudeall Lucas  
Faculty director and associate professor

Darcy Meals  
Assistant director

“Engagement and generosity from alumni, practitioners, and members of the community is what allows the Center for Access to Justice to continue to press onward for more equal and more meaningful access to the justice system. We simply could not do what we do without our supporters.” — Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director