WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. – Morris Dees’ soft drawl belies the fire that the founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center still carries for work that befits Wake Forest University’s motto, Pro Humanitate, or “for humanity.”

Speaking before a couple of hundred law students – as well as faculty members and the public – for the school’s annual Public Interest Retreat on Friday, Feb. 4, Dees pushed students to remember that they are to treat people fairly and that all deserve an equal opportunity.

Dees, 74, used real-life examples during his forty-five minute keynote address to illustrate how lawyers and leaders made a difference. Among those he cited for going above and beyond were John Quincy Adams, Clarence Darrow, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

“That’s what a great lawyer is about,” he said, “making sure the jury knows what it’s all about. Sometimes the laws we have are unjust.”

Dees imagined that if King were alive today he would point out the need to serve people who are homeless, poor and powerless, the kind of people the Southern Poverty Law Center has served in its work since Dees founded the Montgomery, Alabama-based organization in 1971. The center won many groundbreaking civil rights cases to help integrate government and its institutions. In later years, Dees led the Southern Poverty Law Center to file civil lawsuits that helped cripple hate groups, winning large judgments against the organizations. Today, he said, the most significant work being done by the Center has to do with justice for immigrants, he said.

Always, he said, “lawyers have played an important role in making sure we have liberty and justice for all.”

The message resonated with students. Paige Sova, a first-year law student, said Dees was “definitely inspirational.”

Likewise, first-year student Kristina Wolf said she found it fascinating how Dees [used history to highlight individuals who like] Adams and King “had to stand up in their times.”

Third-year student Bianca Hudson said, “I think the struggles are still there. Just the faces have changed.”
Project, Public Interest Initiatives Continue To Grow

Last year Academic Dean Suzanne Reynolds, a faculty committee, and a group of visionary students laid an excellent foundation for the development of the pro bono program. Building upon that excellent start, this year the number and ethnic mix of law students participating in pro bono work has increased dramatically. The pro bono program has generated renewed law student interest in the delivery of legal information and supervised services.

In the fall semester, law students worked diligently with the Legal Aid office in Winston-Salem to assist in cases involving Medicaid, exemptions, divorce, and child custody issues. Also, since the beginning of the school year, several law students have driven five hours round trip from Winston-Salem to Pembroke, N.C. to help the Lumbee Indians at the Legal Aid office in Pembroke. In January nearly 40 law students joined a new student interest group which will help Veterans file initial disability claims and appeals. These students attended one or two workshops for training and are in the process of receiving certification to help veterans file disability claims and to assist with their appeals. A large number of students also assisted the Forsyth County District Attorney’s Office with a special N.C. Racial Justice Act compliance project, by reading over case files from hundreds of cases in which the death penalty was a potential sentence to summarize the relevant facts and flag aggravating factors for attorney review.

Under the supervision of the volunteer attorneys, our law students have helped members of the community with child custody issues as well as assisting a Native American women’s group form a 501(c)(3) corporation. The newly rejuvenated law student group Outlaw is preparing legal information workshops for the Wake Forest undergraduate students on bullying, and law students have volunteered to do workshops on the rights of the homeless upon encounters by law enforcement officers. The interests of the students have proliferated.

In other areas, law students have gained valuable experience in developing job descriptions and a social media policy for a homeless shelter. The animal rights law student group is developing plans to remove abused horses from homes where the horses have been mistreated. Last but not least, nearly 20 students continued the tradition of providing tax preparation services for the underserved population through the VITA project. The scale and variety of our pro bono services has expanded, and we look forward to the continued growth of the Pro Bono Project in order to meet the underserved needs of the local community.

The Public Interest Initiative has launched engaging programs this school year. The organization recently held an extremely successful Public Interest Retreat this past February. The Retreat featured a keynote speech by Morris Dees, co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center, entitled “With Justice For All.” Following the speech, students had the opportunity to meet with 10 attorneys, including several Wake Forest law school alumni, who work in various aspects of public interest law. The discussions focused on career possibilities, job opportunities, and the personal benefits of working in the public interest field. Our Public Interest Initiative also sponsored a program providing information on debt relief programs available for public interest attorneys and joined efforts with the Office of Career Services to recruit public interest attorneys and employers to participate in Career Services events.

Ambitious goals have been set for next year as we build upon the Public Interest Retreat and enhance the organization’s visibility among students. Moreover, plans to formally merge with the Public Interest Law Organization, and integrate PILO’s grant-making function into the Initiative’s long-term plans should take place before next fall. The student board of the Initiative is excited about the possibility of expanding alumni involvement with the organization and it is working fervently on a networking directory and possible mentoring program. As such, the Public Interest Initiative is soliciting information from alumni to build the directory and to feature Wake graduates’ public interest work on the organization’s website. We have created an alumni survey, which is available at our website: publicinterest.law.wfu.edu.

Attorneys interested in supporting the Public Interest Initiative in any way may contact student leaders at publicinterestinitiative@gmail.com. We look forward to interacting with you and we welcome your input.
On Feb. 4, Wake Forest University School of Law’s Public Interest Initiative held its Second Annual Public Interest Retreat. It was an excellent event that inspired students to consider public interest and public services jobs and to give back through pro bono work. Morris Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center, was the keynote speaker (see separate article about his speech) and gave a lunch time address to a packed auditorium at the law school. Students, faculty, and members of the community were in attendance.

After Mr. Dees’ speech, students and faculty attending the retreat were able to socialize with Mr. Dees and other guest speakers at a lunch reception in the board room. Students enjoyed the opportunity to speak with attorneys in this informal gathering. After lunch, the other participating guest attorneys held “Breakout Sessions” at which they discussed their education, career paths, and current work public interest work. Students rotated through three breakout sessions during the afternoon:

- **CRIMINAL JUSTICE PANEL:** Lizmar Bosques (Forsyth County ADA); Patrick Chisholm (Assistant Public Defender; South Georgia Judicial Circuit); Greg Davis (Senior Litigator, Public Defender, Middle District of NC); Kevin Zolot (Assistant US Attorney, Western District of NC)

- **GOVERNMENT PANEL:** Patrick Baker (City Attorney, Durham, NC); Susan Cheng (US Citizenship and Immigration Services); Gene Fishel (Assistant Attorney General, VA AG’s Office); Judge Ralph Walker (former county attorney, Superior Court judge, Court of Appeals judge, and Director of the NC AO C)

- **NON-PROFIT PANEL:** Anita Earls (Executive Director, Southern Coalition for Social Justice); Hazel Mack (Regional Director and Mortgage Foreclosure Program Director, Legal Aid of NC)

After the breakout sessions, the Dean’s office hosted a festive closing reception in the board room. It was a memorable event and the Public Interest Initiative looks forward to the continued growth of this program.

The National Jurist and preLaw magazines have named Wake Forest among the nation’s best law schools for public interest.

“Sometimes people look at public interest or pro bono work as an extracurricular activity,” said Dean Blake Morant in one article. “We saw this as a very important part of the education of the student. Giving back is about being a true lawyer.”

The magazines gave Wake Forest a “B” letter grade among the 96 schools that made the “Best Public Interest Law Schools” list. Law schools make the rankings if they meet three main criteria: have one or more public interest clinics; have one or more faculty committees/administrators that oversee public interest; and have a loan repayment assistance program.
Students Help Implement Racial Justice Act

BY ERIKA MOSES AND PROFESSOR RON WRIGHT

In early October, more than 20 students committed to work with the Forsyth County District Attorney’s office on a major project. Their goal was to review the files of more than 200 people charged with capital crimes to determine if race may have played a role in recommending the death penalty for some of those cases. Pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. §15A-2010 et seq. (“The Racial Justice Act”), an inmate on death row may request review of his or her case if the inmate believes that the prosecutor considered race when recommending the death penalty. The statute allows the judge, in a post-conviction proceeding, to use statewide statistics as part of this inquiry.

As part of this Racial Justice Act (RJA) litigation, prosecutors must explain the pattern of charging decisions in all their homicide cases over the last ten years, relying on non-racial aggravating factors (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 15A-2000(e)), such as the seriousness of the offense and the impact of the crime on the victim’s family and community.

This requires a detailed review of homicide files from the police and prosecutors in this county over the past 10 years, and Wake Forest law school students were eager and ready for the challenge.

With an interest in criminal law, an eye for detail, and a strong desire to help, the students who had been trained by Assistant District Attorney and Wake Forest Professor of Practice David Hall began their work.

Not only did the student summarize the factual and legal background for each case file, but they also helped to lighten the workload and free up valuable time for the attorneys at the District Attorney’s Office. The students who volunteered their time for this project exemplified Wake Forest law’s motto of Pro iustitia (“In Service of Justice.”)
THE PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH FELLOWS PROGRAM

Each year, the Wake Forest School of Law’s Community Law & Business Clinic accepts a small number of law students to work in the clinic as Public Interest Research Fellows. Through the Fellowship, the Community Law & Business Clinic offers an opportunity for third-year law students to gain practical experience with public interest law while still in law school through opportunities working with Clinic clients and exposure to distinct areas of public interest law.

This personalized focus is a unique aspect of this fellowship program. In the past, students have pursued their interests in poverty law, environmental law, and consumer law, among others. In the end, Fellows work in an area of their choosing where there is a need for good lawyers to do great things. Through this work, Fellows gain experience and develop a network of contacts and resources that will help to launch a career in the public interest.

The placement provides both a summer clerking position in the clinic and funding for a part-time position during school.

Also unique to this fellowship program is that Fellows are given the time, faculty support, and other resources needed to apply for prestigious national post-graduate public interest fellowships such as the Skadden Fellowship, Equal Justice Works Fellowship, Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowship, among others. Four out of six Public Interest Fellows so far have applied to post-graduate public interest fellowship programs.

2010-2011 PUBLIC INTEREST FELLOWS

Emily Cantrell is a third-year law student interested in entrepreneurial law, specifically the legal aspects of organizing and operating socially responsible companies. Through the Public Interest Research Fellowship, she researched how to structure and finance the Limited Liability Low-Profit Company (L3C) – a new corporate form that enables mission-oriented for-profit companies to obtain debt & equity investments from private foundations. In addition, she researched the tax and securities implications of qualifying distributions by private foundations in the form of Program Related Investments (PRIs).

Peter Ledford is a third-year law student interested in environmental law and policy. Through the Public Interest Research Fellowship he researched issues surrounding the implementation of large-scale electricity generation from renewable energy sources. By conducting a case study of Fort Bragg, he explored the interplay between the federal and state laws and regulations, and assessed the feasibility of large scale renewable electricity generation given the demanding regulatory framework. Additionally, the Fellowship allowed Peter to work with environmental non-profits and food systems organizations assisting with their business development needs.

Michael Lennox is a third-year law student interested in community economic development. Through the Public Interest Research Fellowship, he helped several small businesses in Winston-Salem identify and solve complex legal issues, ranging from tax and employment, to financing and strategic restructuring. Additionally, he helped other entities through the initial start-up phase by drafting articles of incorporation and bylaws. Michael benefitted from these real-world interactions with local businesses, gaining tremendous insight into the importance of small business development in urban economies and the challenges involved in establishing small businesses and other local enterprises. He says he will undoubtedly use these experiences in his practice as an attorney after law school.

In addition to the experiential component of his fellowship, Michael researched causes and possible solutions to “food access inequality” in low-income areas in the United States. Residents of low-income neighborhoods often suffer from limited access to healthy food, which can have catastrophic individual health consequences and social costs over long periods of time. In hopes of combating this pernicious issue, Michael researched all levels of food systems from production to consumer markets. His hope is that this research will allow the Community Law & Business Clinic to design and implement strategies to improve fresh food access in so-called “food deserts” throughout urban, suburban, and rural areas of North Carolina and beyond.

PUBLIC INTEREST FELLOWS

STEVIE VIRGIL
Director of the Community Law & Business Clinic
STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

AISHA FORTE TALKS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE
WORKING ON THE BETHESDA HOMELESS CENTER PROJECT

As a law student it is very easy to get involved in the day-to-day grind of preparing for classes and exams, but participating in the Pro Bono Project gave me a chance to step back and apply what I’ve learned in the classroom to a real world setting. I worked for the Bethesda Homeless Center here in Winston-Salem. They do great work in our community and for individuals facing temporary or chronic homelessness. The Center was in need of review of their Human Resources policies and employee manual as well as an update to their job descriptions. Under the supervision of an attorney I was able to help update and amend their policies and job descriptions to ensure compliance with the applicable employment and labor laws. My experience with the Pro Bono Project was not only an opportunity to give back to an organization who gives so much to the community, but also to gain practical legal experience that I can discuss in an interview or put on my resume.

MATT HAYES TALKS ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE
WORKING ON THE RACIAL JUSTICE ACT PROJECT

Last semester, I worked with the Forsyth County District Attorney’s Office reviewing capital crime cases for the Racial Justice Act Project. Under the Racial Justice Act, district attorney offices in North Carolina must provide statistical data of all capital cases.

The purpose of this endeavor is to determine whether race has been a significant factor in capital sentencing. If there is significant evidence of racial bias in sentencing, a defendant may be able to avoid the death penalty.

As a result of the act, the Forsyth County District Attorney’s Office needed help reviewing more than 100 detective reports and asked the Wake Forest Pro Bono Project for assistance. Several other students and I provided summaries of each case and addressed any factors that might evidence racial discrimination.

Each case was unique and interesting. I really enjoyed applying my research and analytical skills to reconstruct the crimes. Also, it was a pleasure serving the community in an effort to fight racial injustice. In sum, the project was a worthwhile and rewarding experience.

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW FOUNDS
STUDENT ANIMAL LEGAL DEFENSE FUND CHAPTER

Wake Forest University School of Law has partnered with the Animal Legal Defense Fund to create a student chapter of the national non-profit group. Wake Forest law students will join the ranks of hundreds of other student chapter members nationwide, taking on projects such as: hosting speakers, debates, and panels, tabling on campus to raise awareness about animal issues; and volunteering to do pro bono legal research and writing for local law firms and animal welfare organizations. Students interested in joining the Wake SALDF chapter should contact chapter president Kimberly Richards at richka9@wfu.edu.

To read the full press release visit the Pro Bono Project Blog:
http://probono.law.wfu.edu/2011/03/wake-students-start-new CHAPTER OF STUDENT-ANIMAL-LEGAL-DEFENSE-FUND/
The Public Interest Law Organization (PILO) hosted its annual auction on Jan. 21, which raised more than $17,000. All of the money raised goes to fund summer grants for students working in unpaid, public interest legal internships. Students who receive grants work in many different jobs such as non-profits, public defender’s office, district attorney’s office, and Legal Aid. The auction was organized and hosted by the members of the PILO Board, including the 2011 Auction Chairs Andi Dorfman and Kat Hauch, and President Jackie Willingham.

The silent auction included autographed Maya Angelou books and Wake Football jerseys. With 3L Jason Benetti as the auctioneer, the live auction featured many favorite auction items, including two watercolor paintings donated by Professor George “Mad Dog” Walker and the ultimate romantic weekend getaway including a flight in Professor Michael Green’s private jet and dinner in Charleston, S.C., as well as numerous student and faculty donations. Exciting new items were also added, such as a day at the shooting range with Army veterans, dinner with WFU alumnus and Detroit Lion Alphonso Smith More than two dozen local businesses also donated to the auction.

Over two dozen local businesses also donated to the auction. The auction and many summer grants are possible due to the generosity of local businesses, Wake Forest professors, and students. Special thanks to Burke St. Pizza, Dewey’s Bakery and Raylen Vineyard for donating a portion of the food and beverages for the event.

PILO would also like to thank Lawren Thach for her help coordinating the event.

**NFL Star, Alumnus Supports Pro Bono Project**

From March 7-11, 2011, the Wake Forest Pro Bono Project held its annual alternative spring break in Pembroke, N.C. Third-year students Lamar Armstrong, Michael Lennox, and Jackie Willingham and second-year students Katie Barber, Kaitlyn Girard, and Andrew Kisz worked with Legal Aid of Pembroke and the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina throughout the week on a variety of important legal issues.

In particular, members of the group evaluated the constitutionality of a key tribal ordinance as it related to the tribal government’s budget process, while others helped prepare federal grant proposals. The group also made two presentations on wills and end-of-life-planning to groups of tribal elders in the community, as well as one presentation on the importance of higher education to high school students at the tribe’s Boys & Girls Club chapter. Finally, group members worked with Legal Aid on foreclosure issues and helped a nonprofit with its articles of incorporation and bylaws.

In addition to the projects that the group tackled during spring break, the Pro Bono Project also had an eye toward long-term collaborations with Legal Aid of Pembroke and the Lumbees. Former Marine Jackie Willingham met with leaders at a volunteer-run medical clinic with the hopes of establishing a means for law students to help the clinic process veterans’ claims during the 2011-2012 school year. Other students are now busy preparing for a free Legal Aid-sponsored wills clinic in May.

According to attorneys at Legal Aid, the organization is currently unable to handle any additional wills clients until the end of October. By co-sponsoring one or more free wills clinics, the Pro Bono Project would considerably improve Legal Aid’s ability to process existing will requests, while at the same time providing a tremendous need to this underserved community.


Land Rights, Religious Freedom Symposium Set

An exciting two-day Symposium will be held April 7-8 at the unique new event space, “The Barn at Reynolda Village.”

This Symposium will feature prominent speakers from all over the country, including the former Chief Counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, the Director of the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, several Federal Indian law scholars, (including Wake Forest’s own Professor David Smith), leading policy advocates, and tribal leaders from such tribes as the San Carlos Apache and Hopi (both in Arizona), and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (Western North Carolina). The Symposium will focus on issues that are national in scope, including trust land issues, environmental degradation, the legal instruments available for the protection of tribal land, including international law, and the practical consequences and implications of these laws for the sovereignty and well-being of American Indian communities.

The Symposium’s intended outcome is to develop working groups as needed, and to chart a collaborative course of action for the protection of American Indian land rights.

The Pro Bono Project is a proud member of the Symposium Planning Committee and will have several students at the Symposium who will be gathering data on land rights issues that are affecting the tribal members (or their respective tribes) in attendance. The data gathered will be used to identify effective strategies to address land rights issues, which will entail either brokering relationships with third party organizations, or lending direct support through the Pro Bono Project where appropriate.

The Symposium is an interdisciplinary event that is co-sponsored by a number of organizations across the Wake Forest University campus, including the Department of Religion; Center for Ethics, Religion and Law; and the Institute for Public Engagement. The Symposium is also co-sponsored by the Center for Native Health (Cherokee, NC) in collaboration with the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs.

CALL FOR SURVEY RESPONSES FROM PUBLIC INTEREST / PUBLIC SERVICE ATTORNEYS

The Public Interest Initiative is seeking survey responses for their Alumni Information database.

A link to the survey is available near the top of the Public Interest Initiative website, publicinterest.law.wfu.edu.

The Public Interest Initiative has four goals for the information collected through this survey, and you can choose how your information is used.

1. The first goal is to create a private directory of alumni interested in the work of the Public Interest Initiative so that they can be kept up to date on our activities;
2. The second is to create a directory available to students for networking purposes;
3. The third is to set the foundation for a mentor program between alumni and current law students;
4. Finally, we hope to find Wake Forest alumni with interesting careers in public interest law so that they can be featured on our website.

You can learn more about the Public Interest Initiative, including information about our upcoming retreat, by visiting publicinterest.law.wfu.edu.

CALL ISSUED FOR PROJECT ATTORNEYS

Attorneys can request a law student to assist with their pro bono work by submitting a project at http://probono.law.wfu.edu/forms/project-request-form/ or by emailing Professor Hopkins at hopkinmn@wfu.edu.

The Environmental Law Society has students interested in volunteering to assist with an environmental law related pro bono case. If you are an attorney that is working on an environmental pro bono case or are willing to take on such a case with student help, please contact the Pro Bono Project.