



pro bono  
students  
canada

réseau national  
d'étudiant(e)s  
pro bono



“ We started PBSC because, at that time, there was no formal organization in Canada to champion the profession’s commitment to pro bono service. I’m proud that PBSC became one of the key galvanizing organizations for *pro bono* practice in Canada. ”

*Why did you think that an organization such as PBSC was needed in Canada?*

We were struck by the lack of any formal organization in Canada to champion the role and value of the profession’s commitment to pro bono service. The lack of awareness of the role of pro bono was particularly troublesome given my role as a legal educator. By championing the value of pro bono service, we were able to remind students, the profession and the public at large that there are many opportunities for public interest work in the profession, including in traditional practice settings.

*How did the idea for PBSC originally come about, and then develop into a pilot project?*

PBSC was modeled on several different organizations that operated in the United States. But, whereas the American model required participating schools to pay an overhead fee, we went at this a different way, and successfully sought start-up funding from two visionary benefactors: the Kahanoff Foundation and the Law Foundation of Ontario. As a result of their early support, we were able to enlist the involvement of schools across the country. From the get go, the program was extremely well received, and provoked considerable interest from law students and community organizations, which benefit enormously from the passion and service of students.

*What was your vision for the organization at the beginning? What were your expectations for its reach and impact?*

In truth, there were lots of naysayers at the outset. Some members of the profession criticized the commitment to pro bono as being inimical to the need to ensure governmental responsibility for broad access to legal aid. Others felt that community organizations wouldn’t welcome support from law students. Still others saw the organization as unlikely to have any impact on the profession. Of course, they were wrong on all counts, but we weren’t so sure at the time!

*How do you feel about the growth of PBSC, and the fact that a program you started is now established at almost every law school in Canada?*

Enormously proud. I’m proud of the fact that PBSC became one of the key galvanizing organizations for pro bono practice and organized pro bono organizations in Canada, proud of the impact it has had on the culture of the profession, and proud to see that it is one of the leading voices for law students in Canada. Today the organization is benefiting from the inspired leadership of two dear friends of mine: National Director Nikki Gershain, and U of T Law Dean Ed Iacobucci. I couldn’t be happier to see how PBSC has grown and thrived over the last 20 years.

Ronald J. Daniels,  
President, Johns Hopkins University & Founding Dean, Pro Bono Students Canada