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Lorne Sossin,
Dean, Osgoode Hall Law School

I first stumbled on PBSC in its fifth year, when it was located in a garret loft in Falconer Hall at the University of Toronto. When I started teaching there, I happened to be assigned the office just next door. Pam Shime, PBSC’s then Director and I became fast friends, and she in turn introduced me to Harvey Brownstone, among many other PBSC fellow travellers. That kindred relationship continued with Noah-Aiken Klar and now, of course, is stronger than ever with Nikki Gersh bain. As PBSC has moved from strength to strength, it has also moved from school to school, covering the whole country, in both official languages, touching diverse areas of law and allowing scores of law students to become problem solvers and to see law through the lens of its impact.

At its heart, PBSC’s project is a campaign against apathy and in service of optimism. Its premise is that each law student can make a positive difference in the legal system, even (and especially) if that occurs through students coming face to face with the complexities and limits of law. Legal education is at its best when it brings together ideas about law with law in action, and this aspiration lies at the heart of every PBSC program.

I think it is fair to say I have seen first-hand the transformative potential of PBSC from more perspectives than most. As a law professor both at U of T and Osgoode, I have seen the benefits of engaged law students, drawing on PBSC experiences in their understanding both of substantive legal fields and of legal ethics and professionalism. As a Dean, I can attest to PBSC’s regenerative ability to bring the best out in Osgoode’s students, faculty, staff and the many collaborating organizations who participate in its programs. I have seen its return on investment as a funder during the years I spent as a Trustee of the Law Foundation of Ontario (which from PBSC’s inception to the present has provided its largest source of financial support). Further, as a Vice Chair of the Health Profession Appeal and Review Board, I have witnessed the effect of PBSC on clients and the quality of dispute resolution as part of the Health Law Advocacy Project. By any of these measures, PBSC has been a striking success.

On a more personal note, over the past two decades, I have had a chance to regularly take part in PBSC events, whether to join the annual PBSC volunteer appreciation reception in the Spring or the summer training events, or just to Flip My Wig for the cause. PBSC has become for me a community – populated by legal education, public interest and access to justice aficionados of all ages and stages of career.

I had the good fortune to be on hand in June of 2011 at PBSC’s 15th Anniversary when Justice Rosalie Abella presented former U of T Law Dean Ron Daniels with an award for what he helped set in motion. Over my years in this community, I have been privileged to see the fruits of extraordinary commitment and passion from PBSC’s leadership and staff, to the dozens of student coordinators at all Canadian Law Schools. For an organization still less than a generation old, it has set in motion generations of graduates convinced law can be better, and that those with a legal education can make it better. I have no doubt the best is yet to come!