

Community Engaged Learning

Community Engaged Learning is a pedagogical method, the intention of which is to enhance the student's understanding of the material by engaging the community in a way that allows them to test theory learned in the classroom. The student performs service for the community while gaining a deeper understanding of the course material being taught.

Stetson University has a number of different community-engaged learning opportunities. Below is a list of some of Stetson's signature community engaged learning programs:

College of Law Pro-Bono Program

Stetson Law, founded in 1900, was the first law school in Florida and one of the first law schools in the country to establish a pro bono service requirement for graduation. The College of Law is nationally recognized in higher education and legal fields for its emphasis on public interest and social justice. These values come directly from the University's mission of providing in students "the qualities of mind and heart that will prepare them to reach their full potential as informed citizens of local communities and the world."

Stetson Law requires each student to complete 60 hours of legal and non-legal related pro bono service prior to graduation, including work with legal aid societies, local nonprofits, and government agencies. The Office of Student Life partners with College of Law faculty to coordinate and document students' pro bono service. General office duties are recorded as non-legal hours; hours worked for a private attorney/firm or for public legal good are recorded as legal pro bono upon documentation that the case was a pro bono case. In order to maximize impact on the community, travel time to and from sites is not eligible. Law students often volunteer on cases related to social justice causes, including environmental protection and conservation, elder law, immigration law, homeless advocacy, bankruptcy law, and a nationally-recognized emerging veterans law program. In the 2012-2013 academic year alone, Stetson Law students completed over 25,000 hours of service, which had an economic impact of over \$2.1 million in savings to organizations, tax payers and indigent clients in the Tampa and St. Petersburg communities.

Two areas of concentration are particularly important for the College of Law's pro bono program: Veterans Advocacy and Elder Law. Through the Veterans Law Institute (<http://www.stetson.edu/law/veterans/>), four major services are offered, including (a) legal help provided by law students to veterans who are having challenges with receiving their Veterans Administration disability benefits; (b) general counsel provided by law students to veterans and their immediate families who need free legal help; (c) student services for active or retired service members who are current or prospective law students; and (d) public policy education and advocacy in the community, legal profession, and academia. Because the Institute receives hundreds of requests each year for each of its services, it has a team of students who help manage the Advocacy Clinic by providing regular office hours as well as some services to walk-in clients.

Through the Center for Excellence in Elder Law (<http://www.stetson.edu/law/academics/elder/home/>), many services are offered to educate the community about issues facing the elderly as

well as to directly assist the elderly with legal questions they may have. Stetson Law's Elder Consumer Protection Program serves as an educational and information resource on general and legal matters regarding elder consumer fraud and scam protection and awareness. It is supported by institutional and state funding and provides resources such as group presentations, events, credit reports, opt-out/do-not-call registration, consumer inquiries and alerts, instructional reference guides, and informational resource directories. This Center is partly run by students who have declared a concentration in Elder Law. The Center also manages the preeminent international journal for elder law, the *Journal of International Aging, Law & Policy* – a partnership with the AARP.

By combining their highly-specialized academic training with community-based problems, Stetson Law students are truly leading the nation in developing issue-based advocacy centers that benefit the community while preparing students for the rigors and challenges of a life devoted to the law and the community. These students are living the Stetson mission of "committing to active forms of social responsibility."

Volusia County Schools Partnership

For over sixteen years, Stetson University, through the Nina B. Hollis Institute for Educational Reform, and the Volusia County School district have collaborated in K-12 education reform through the establishment of Professional Development Schools.

Professional Development Schools (PDS) are schools that collaborate with universities to accomplish common educational goals that include developing exemplary practice to maximize student outcomes, providing optimum sites for teacher candidate preparation, offering educator professional development, and implementing reflective inquiry to enhance teacher and student learning. Professional Development Schools are educational partnerships built upon mutual trust, respect, and a shared belief that together we can better prepare students for the world of tomorrow.

The Stetson University Professional Development School Network is guided by the following goals:

1. Increase student achievement,
2. Implement research-based best practices in teaching,
3. Provide on-going support for pre-service and in-service activities to enhance professionalism, and
4. Develop strong professional development partnerships.

The Stetson University Professional Development School Network operates on a three-year cycle with the current cycle running from 2012 – 2015. Our Professional Development Schools for this cycle are Blue Lake Elementary School, Citrus Grove Elementary School, Edith I. Starke Elementary School and Woodward Avenue Elementary School. At the beginning of each school year, each PDS develops school based focus areas that are aligned with the PDS Network goals.

Each PDS has a school based governance structure known as the steering council, which is comprised of school and university representatives. It is through the steering council that the work of each respective PDS is identified and monitored, roles and responsibilities are delineated, resources are secured, and outcomes are assessed.

The Hollis Institute at Stetson University has a full time Professional Development School liaison that coordinates the PDS initiatives between the university and the Volusia County Schools. Faculty from

the Hollis Institute serve on the School Advisory Council and the PDS Steering Council for each of our partnership schools. Stetson faculty provide school based faculty development and provide resource support in our PDS schools and classrooms. Teacher candidates provide hands on assistance in classrooms and after school programs and facilitate family nights at our PDSs. In addition, Stetson University also provides outreach support to our PDSs through onsite university experiences for school children such as visits to the Gillespie Museum and attendance at athletic events.

The Stetson University Professional Development School partnership has had a positive impact on the students in our PDS schools through innovative initiatives such as the Starke S.T. A. R. S. (Students Turning Around and Reaching Success) at risk intervention program, The Blue Lake DaVinci Club afterschool literacy enhancement program, and the single gender program option at Woodward Avenue Elementary School. In addition, teacher candidates in our initial teacher certification program at Stetson University benefit from ongoing and integrated field experience aligned with course work across their teacher education program.

In October 2013, Stetson University and Volusia County School System were recognized by Florida Campus Compact as being the Campus Community Partnership of the Year in the state of Florida. Here is a video that highlights the partnership further: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ8KVljhMUU> (<http://www.youtube.com/watch/?v=RJ8KVljhMUU>)

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program

Stetson University has a long history partnering with the United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties, specifically through their Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. The Stetson Accounting Department has adopted the VITA program into their curriculum. The student volunteers complete a two day intensive training alongside their accounting professors. Once they complete the training they become IRS Certified where they are then able to help identify taxpayer's eligibility for the EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit), Child Tax Credit, and other federally sponsored credits and help them file accurate tax returns. Stetson University hosts the VITA program at no cost in a computer lab in the Lynn Business Center, which is located a block from downtown DeLand. In 2012 thirty student volunteers completed 172 tax returns and were able to secure \$202,148 in tax refunds to local community members. Here is a video that highlights the partnership further: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pg5SFDbnEYc> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch/?v=pg5SFDbnEYc>)