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Law problems? Try ASUO legal service !

By JOYCE BOLES
Of the Emerald

Are you thinking about a divorce? Or are you worried that you might be getting ripped off by your landlord? Are you getting threats from a creditor who sold you a worthless car, or a stereo, or a life membership in something you can't use? Are you thinking of becoming a non-profit corporation?

If you're a student at the University, you can avail yourself of free legal services, compliments of your incidental fees. The ASUO contracts with a Springfield law firm for group legal services for students. Students get legal counsel from the lawyer's office on the third floor of the EMU, and the service which costs about ten cents a month per student is taken from the incidental fees.

Attorneys Bob Ackerman and Tom Hanlon, of Babcock & Ackerman in Springfield, see as many as 14 or 15 students a day by appointment in their office at 318 EMU. The two attorneys saw 1,462 students in 1972, working about 30 hours a week between the two of them.

The firm was originally retained by the ASUO two years ago to represent the student body in a lobbying capacity. The firm's function was redesigned during the summer of 1971. Beginning in September, 1971, the firm began representing individual students. At that time only two other universities had similar programs—usually called group legal service, much like group health plans. The program costs the ASUO \$18,000 a year.

ASUO provides the attorneys with office space and equipment, but the firm pays all other expenses out of the \$18,000. There are two part-time secretaries, and the firm is willing and eager to train secretaries to be legal assistants or paraprofessionals in law.

Ackerman believes his office serves 80 per cent of the students' legal needs. The office is unable to handle matters involving litigation, criminal cases tax matters and estate planning, cases against the

ASUO, incorporations for private profit, and certain other things.

But this leaves a wide range of services the firm can and does provide: advice and consultation, referrals, negotiations with adverse parties, legal research, leases, contracts, settlements, releases, notarial acts, incorporations, and no-fault divorces. The firm has also been known to take test cases involving constitutional law; for example, an unconstitutional denial of food stamps to an eligible party is something Ackerman is willing to fight.

Ackerman believes he is "equalizing the rights" of his clients. "I think in terms of a student service," he says. He believes programs like this one will be the rule rather than the exception on campuses in the future. He has answered inquiries from 30 to 40 other universities about the program.

Ackerman also refers cases of consumer fraud to Oregon Student Public Interest Group (OSPIRG) for investigation. He is close-mouthed about recent cases, but he believes he is in a position to detect which local merchants are ripping off students systematically, and when he does become suspicious he says he makes waves about it.

Ackerman does not believe in "empire building," and does not foresee any expansion of the program in the near future. He does believe the office can become more efficient. To that end, he would like to transfer research functions to law students, for example. Some law students assist the firm now, but their participation can be expanded.

Ackerman says the service also needs more secretarial help and more office space. Two tiny cubicles aren't big enough to handle the volume of people who use them.

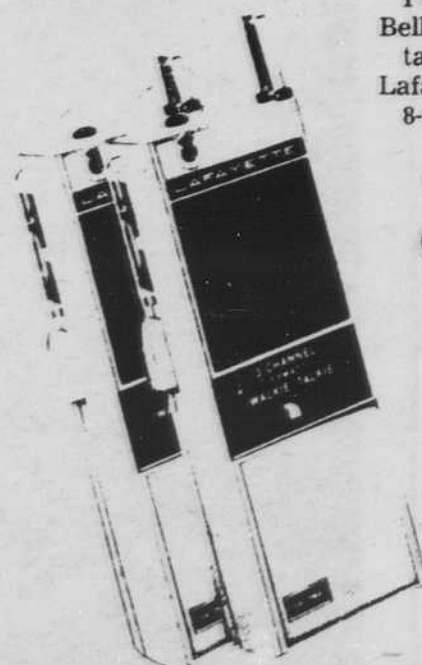
Ackerman keeps his office out of ASUO politics, but he does represent students when conflicts arise with the administration and faculty. He stresses that anything students tell him is privileged, but consultations with advisors and administrators are not.



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