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# Legal Services' attorney lends helping hand

By Jeff Morgan  
Emerald Reporter

Ilona Koleszar possibly has the most thriving law practice in town — the "mega-practice" or "aerobic practice of law" as she calls it.

But one thing keeps Koleszar from the country clubs and BMWs other busy lawyers have — Koleszar's clients don't pay her anything. Koleszar, a 1983 graduate of the University law school, is the ASUO Legal Services attorney.

Legal Services is open to any student with just about any legal problem. Koleszar said the

three main categories of her caseload are family law (divorces, adoptions, child custody, etc.), criminal misdemeanors (shop lifting, disorderly conduct, drunk driving, etc.) and landlord/tenant disputes.

Koleszar, who started her job in July, added that although those are her most common cases, she does handle other types of legal questions. "There's a host of other things from A to Z that include consumer complaints and contract breaches," she said. Koleszar said the office also executes expungements, which is the legal sealing of a criminal record.

She is precluded by law from defending students involved in felony charges. She does not handle business law, or any profit-oriented case, such as business incorporation or tax preparation. She also cannot handle student/student conflicts or student/University conflicts.

The office is restricted not only by law as to what can and cannot be done, but also by time commitments. If she is presented with a case that will take up too much time, such as a complicated child custody suit, Koleszar will not accept it, saying it would keep her from serving other students who use the office.

"It's beyond the scope of what's fair under the circumstances," Koleszar said. "What I perceive as the purpose of this office... is to take care of low-income students' daily, regular legal problems... to keep their lives as free from legal problems as possible."

Koleszar currently is working on about 50 cases. She sees about five clients a day. Last year, the program saw 1,675 clients.

Oregon State and Southern Oregon College both have legal services, and both have the same legal dictations the University program faces.

In addition to her individual



Photo by Shu-Shing Chen

**Ilona Koleszar, the new University Legal Services attorney, maintains a demanding schedule.**

cases, the Legal Services attorney also serves as a legal advisor to the ASUO president. ASUO President Kasey Brooks said she has been pleased with Koleszar's transition to the new job.

Brooks continued to say along with Legal Services, the ASUO Student Advocate and the University Mediation Program, that "The University of Oregon has among the finest student services of any school in the nation."

The Legal Services office is not a one-woman show. In addition to Koleszar, the office has a receptionist, a legal assistant and three law clerks.

Despite the heavy workload, Koleszar said she believes students are being better served this year. This is the first year the attorney position has been funded for 40 hours a week. Until this year, it was a 20-hour position. She said the first thing she did when she got the job was to increase the appointment time from 15 minutes to 30 minutes to keep students from feeling rushed.

Because the position is now full-time, she believes she has the workload under control. "I'm trying to make sure that people aren't waiting too long

to see me," she said. However, the office still is generally booked a week in advance.

Koleszar has had the job only four months; however, she said she experienced few surprises when she moved into her office on the third floor of the EMU. Koleszar studied the office records, so she knew about the heavy caseload and about what types of cases she would be dealing with. Moreover, she had dealt with a number of student cases at a private practice she had in Springfield.

However, she admits to one surprise: she wasn't prepared to be working in a large bureaucracy such as the University system.

"The only thing that kind of took me for a loop... is mastering the art of institutional thinking," she admitted. She added that filling out the plethora of forms it takes to get something fixed is sometimes aggravating, compared to simply phoning a repairperson, as she did at her private practice.

"But when I sit down and think about (such instances), I'm always able to laugh," she said.

The Legal Services office is located in the EMU Room 334, extension 4273.

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