Loyola LRAP awards top $1 million
By Jerry Crimmins
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"The amount of debt is mind boggling" that law school graduates carry today, said professor Henry G. Rose of Loyola University Chicago School of Law.

Loyola tries to ease the burden with its Loan Repayment Assistance Program for those graduates who take public interest jobs, which typically are low-pay.

Rose said the current LRAP award to graduates who qualify is "a drop in the bucket to be honest with you" because average debt of those graduates is more than $120,000, and the typical award is $5,000 annually for three years.

But two graduates said Loyola's LRAP awards are a big deal.

"They are a life saver," said Aaron Ann Rose Cole, an assistant Cook County state's attorney. "It's one of the primary reasons I don't have to get a second job."

"It definitely added to my peace of mind," said Julie M. Harcum, staff attorney for the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago. With the LRAP award, Harcum said she was able to pay off her private loan first, with a higher interest rate.

Loyola recently announced it has approved 34 LRAP awards for 2010 of $5,000 each for a total expenditure of $170,000.

"This is a record year for both the number of alumni recipients and the total dollars awarded," according to a statement from the school.

Loyola also reached a milestone in that it has awarded more than $1 million in LRAP benefits to its recent graduates in public service jobs since the program began in 1998.

The LRAP "was kind of generated by student demand in the mid-1990s," Rose said. Nina S. Appel was dean of Loyola in those years. "The students petitioned her to create it, and she asked me to chair the committee figuring out who would be eligible."

Rose became the first chairman of the LRAP committee at the school and has been chairman ever since.

He said he believed Northwestern University School of Law and the University of Chicago Law School may have started their LRAP programs earlier.

Hilary Hurd Anyaso, a spokeswoman for Northwestern University School of Law, said Northwestern's LRAP began in 1984, and the school has given out about $4 million since then.

The Loyola LRAP began small with only three recipients who each got $2,333.33.
In five years, the program was up to 19 recipients who each got about $2,632, and the numbers have climbed steadily since.

The funds are "generally from donations from alumni or bequests that people make to the law school in their wills," Rose said.

He said the deans since 1998, Appel, interim dean Diane C. Geraghty and the current dean, David N. Yellen, "never actually tell me where they get the money. ... I've never actually asked them.

"They always have enough for everybody who's eligible."

Recipients can get up to three annual awards within five years after graduation.

To be eligible in 2010, people had to graduate from Loyola Law between January 2005 and May 2009. They had to have a qualified, public interest job for the full year of 2010, and their educational debt had to be more than $65,000 as of Jan. 1, 2010.

The annual income for a single person who applied had to be less than $70,000 in 2010, and for a married applicant, it had to be less than $90,000. For each dependent, adjusted gross income could increase $17,000.

Typical recipients, Rose said, are assistant state's attorneys, public defenders, legal aid attorneys and lawyers holding other government jobs.

"They actually get a $5,000 loan from us, which can only be used to repay their educational debt," Rose said. Once recipients present their tax returns for 2010, in April 2011, "and certify they held the job through the end of 2010 ... then we cancel the loan so they don't have to repay it."

This is the best way to keep the Internal Revenue Service from taxing the benefit, according to Rose.

Cole said she graduated in May 2008 and started working for the state's attorney's office in November. (The starting salary on that office's website for this year is $55,937.)

"I applied immediately [for an LRAP award]," Cole said. "It's one of the reasons I went to Loyola. They have a reputation of being a very public-interest-minded school and being very supportive of public interest and government work."

The $5,000 she got last year and this year "absolutely is the bridge" that allowed her to survive without a second job, she said.

"The fact that I can do something I'm so passionate about, and such important work [as a prosecutor]," Cole said, "that's what the LRAP has done for me."


She said she graduated with "close to $120,000 in student loans." Her starting salary at the foundation was about $45,000.

She had both a federally subsidized student loan and a private loan at a higher interest rate.
The Loyola LRAP "actually helped me pay off the private loan," Harcum said.

"I really appreciate all the support and assistance that Loyola has given me, and I hope that this program can continue and flourish so that others can take advantage of it," she said.