PRESTIGIOUS FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED TO UW LAW STUDENTS

Madison, WI—Jessica Shoemaker and Samantha Webb Kading, former legal externs in the Land Law and Tenure Security program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW), were awarded Skadden Public Interest Fellowships in December. Skadden Fellows provide legal services to the poor, elderly, homeless, and disabled, as well as those deprived of their civil or human rights. Shoemaker and Kading’s two-year fellowships will begin in fall 2005.

Shoemaker will work with the Farmers’ Legal Action Group, Inc. in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she will provide legal services to poor farmers struggling to make a living. She will educate farmers about potential legal remedies to land-related issues and ensure that farm communities have full access to the legal system. Using her experience as a Skadden Fellow, she hopes to craft a sustainable solution to the problem of farmers’ legal needs going unmet.

Kading will work with UW’s Land Tenure Center to educate landowners in Wisconsin’s 11 tribal communities about the problem of fractionation, where land is divided among heirs of each succeeding generation in smaller and smaller fractions until no single owner has more than a tiny interest in an allotment. Tens of thousands of Indians have undivided trust interests valued at less than $50, which makes it difficult to use the land in ways that are productive and beneficial. Kading will help owners consolidate landholdings through estate planning tools, and she hopes to engage more attorneys in pro bono efforts in areas of Federal Indian Law.

Shoemaker is a 2004 graduate of the UW Law School and Kading will graduate in 2005. Both credit UW’s Land Law and Tenure Security program with providing a career-changing opportunity. As legal externs in the program in 2002 and 2003, respectively, Shoemaker and Kading worked in the Department of Interior Office of Hearings and Appeals in Bismarck, North Dakota. The Hearings and Appeals office hears all probates of decedents who owned trust land at the time of their death. The externs reduced the backlog of probate cases and researched possible exchanges or gifts of property in order to consolidate the complex fractionated ownership pattern of trust property.

The Land Tenure Center and the Department of Rural Sociology jointly administer the Land Law and Tenure Security program, in cooperation with the UW Law School. The extern program began in 1997 with a single extern. By 2004, 20 law students from 11 law schools were placed at 14 sites throughout the United States. The Otto Bremer Foundation of St. Paul, Minnesota provided funding for both Shoemaker and Kading to participate in the extern program.

The Skadden Fellowship was established in 1998 by the law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP. Each year, 25 fellowships are awarded to 3rd year law students or judicial interns.

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