

DECEMBER 2023

# LEGAL OUTREACH YEAR END APPEAL

Newsletter



## LO Alumnus, Tahj Brown '16, Joins Staff as First Recipient of the James B. O'Neal Legacy Fellowship

In December of 2022, Legal Outreach made a major announcement. Our Founder and Executive Director for 40 years, James B. O'Neal was preparing to hand over the reins to longtime LO leader, Tamika Edwards. To honor James' dedication and service to our students, the Board and Advisory Board, along with our generous donors, raised funds to establish the James B. O'Neal Legacy Fellowship, which would be awarded to an alumnus who could enrich LO's programming for our students.

One year later, we are pleased to announce that the first JBO Legacy Fellowship has been awarded to Tahj Brown, LO Class of 2016 and recent Colby College graduate. Tahj joins our staff as the PACT Program Leader with a mission to provide additional support to our freshmen boys. Based on our alumni data, Legal Outreach has a significantly higher rate of female students completing the four-year College Bound Program than their male counterparts. Something must be done to build a stronger community among our young men – thereby increasing retention – without compromising support for our young ladies. We are so pleased to have Tahj at the head of this initiative to build bonds, organize retreats, extend our recruitment efforts, and connect our students to alumni mentors.

**Thank you to all our donors who helped raise over \$200,000 last December to establish the James B. O'Neal Legacy Fellowship!**

**Please consider making a year-end donation and help us reach our \$50,000 goal to solidify the longevity of this Fellowship and James' Legacy at Legal Outreach!**

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### Question: What does it mean to you to be the first recipient of the James B. O'Neal Legacy Fellowship?

**Tahj Brown:** I am greatly honored. Mr. O has always been an inspirational figure in my life. I remember the first day I started College Bound, he told us that our country needs more young men wearing suits rather than sports jerseys. He went on to share that he graduated from Harvard Law School with a one-year fellowship and chose to establish Legal Outreach and dedicate his life to serving NYC's youth rather than pursue a more financially lucrative legal career. All the work he has done since then has changed my life and that of my peers for the better. It is my duty to ensure that I respect his legacy through this fellowship. My aim is to continue his work by ensuring a higher retention, matriculation, and success rate of our young men of color.



### Q: How was your experience as a Legal Outreach student, and how has that impacted your life since?

**Brown:** In middle school, I was interested in law and discovered the Summer Law Institute through a teacher's recommendation. I was excited for the opportunity to learn criminal law and act as a lawyer in our mock trial. When I joined the four-year College Bound program, I was nervous yet determined to sacrifice the time needed to ensure that I put my best foot forward towards achieving my dreams of both attending and affording college. CB ensured that I wasn't only accepted into college, but I was also prepared for the rigorous workload and knew what to expect socially. I was comfortable with seeking help from my professors and taking advantage of office hours. More than anything though, CB relieved me of suffering from imposter syndrome, making me feel assured that I am both capable and deserving of success in life.

*"The PACT events have given me many opportunities to build friendships and a community within Legal Outreach. One event was to Beat the Bomb, where we had to strategize and play games to beat each challenge before a paint bomb went off! It's been a great experience so far and I look forward to more events with my friends."*

- Delan, Freshman

### Q: What has inspired you to come back to LO and what have you accomplished so far?

**Brown:** After college, I was looking to get into education because I hoped to impart the skills I learned while at LO. I had worked as a tutor during my senior year of high school and as a summer college advisor while a sophomore at Colby. I found those experiences really fulfilling. Joining the LO staff has allowed me to create personal and professional bonds with the freshman male students. Some have already confided in me about life issues, and many are eager to report their academic achievements and/or struggles to ensure they're on the right track. I hope to use the personal connections with students to facilitate a broader sense of community. I want to instill in our young men that they not only have me as their PACT Leader, but they also have each other as PACT Brothers.



## Q: What is your vision for the PACT Program, and why do you think the Legal Outreach community will benefit from this program?



**Brown:** I hope that the PACT Program will empower young men of color to achieve their academic potential and hopefully envision themselves in legal and other professional careers. By strengthening the community among male freshmen, I want our young men to be motivated to perform at high levels, complete all four years of College Bound, and pursue leadership and mentorship in their undergraduate and postgraduate years. As a male student who has gone through the program, I've observed that there are fewer young men than young women completing College Bound. It's important to first understand why this gender gap exists. We can then address the challenges young men from underserved communities face to better equip them to succeed, creating a balanced educational environment. Legal Outreach is dedicated to serving minority students, and so, when we recognize that your young men are especially at risk, it is our duty to ensure that we offer extra support.

*"PACT has had a huge impact on my time at LO because I've been able to form bonds with my classmates. The PACT events have been really fun, and I'm happy that I get the opportunity to meet other College Bound students also who have been in the program longer."*

- Pharoah, Freshman

We are so proud to welcome Mr. Brown to the staff as the PACT Leader!

To support the continuation of the James B. O'Neal Fellowship and the PACT Program, **please consider making a Year-End donation to Legal Outreach!**

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