

## Good PR

Local groups benefit from graduating seniors' hard work • by Katie Risher

**W**HAT DO YOU CALL A THOUSAND lawyers at the bottom of the sea? A good start. Jokes such as this are familiar to most people. After all, nobody likes lawyers, right?

Not so, according to research conducted in the spring by UL Lafayette's senior public relations campaign management class.

The class worked with the Lafayette Parish Bar Association to help counter what the association believed was a negative opinion of local attorneys. Students' findings from surveys, personal interviews and focus groups, however, did not support that belief.

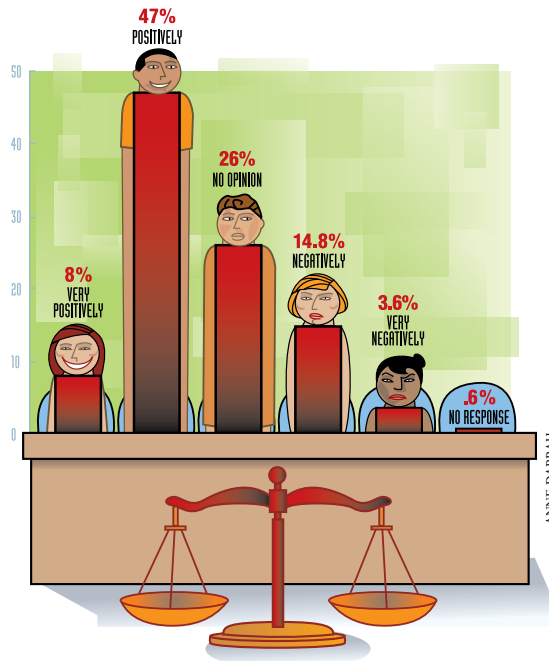
The class found that, in general, lawyers have a much higher status than the LPBA expected. Its research showed that attorneys are viewed "very positively" by 8 percent of residents, "positively" by 47 percent, and "neutrally" by 26 percent. So, a total of 81 percent of respondents had "neutral" to "very positive" impressions of lawyers.

Dr. Sandra Duhé, assistant professor and coordinator of the public relations program, led the class through the project. In a recent interview, she noted the necessity of research for successful campaigns.

"It really underscored the importance of research because had we just gone with intuition, we would have done something that was totally counter to what public opinion of attorneys and the association was. That's what happens when you guess, and that's why we preach research so much. Good public relations is based in research. It's always the first step."

The university's Institutional Review Board must approve all student research before it can be conducted.

In May, the senior class presented its findings and made recommendations



Local lawyers fared well in a public opinion poll conducted by a UL Lafayette public relations class earlier this year.

to the LPBA. They included implementing a biannual seminar to educate the public, using the LPBA web site to make it easier for the public to find an attorney in a certain field of practice, and beginning a job shadow program for high school students. Students produced campaign books for the LPBA that contained step-by-step guides for implementing the recommendations.

The campaign management class is a capstone course for graduating seniors.

"The idea is that it's not a lecture class, but rather, students are expected to come in, roll up their sleeves and apply what they've learned in their public relations studies so far," Duhé said.

After an initial meeting with a client, the class determines its main areas

of concentration. Once the client gives its approval, students follow the ROPES process, which means they first conduct research, then set objectives, design programming and follow up with evaluation. Stewardship is the final step. It is an often forgotten, but vital part of public relations that recognizes that it is easier to keep a friend than it is to make a new one, according to Duhé.

Throughout the semester, the class continues to meet with the client to ensure that its work is on target with the client's goals. "If the client says, 'There is no way we would ever invest the time to do that,' or it's logistically not possible, then it's off the table. We're not going to spend time developing something that's not going to be used," Duhé said.

Due to the quality of work done by these campaigns classes, there is usually a waiting list of potential clients.

Under Duhé's guidance, classes in the past few years have worked with UL Lafayette's Office of Academic Affairs, United Way of Acadiana, UL Lafayette's Center for Business and Information Technologies and the UL Lafayette Alumni Association. In Spring 2007, the class will focus on creating awareness for the new Family Justice Center, an outreach organization that will serve the needs of victims of domestic violence. It is modeled after a center recently established in Monroe and is the result of collaboration among many local agencies, including Faith House and Lafayette Consolidated Government. ■