

## Interdisciplinary Research & Leadership Opportunities for Duke Law Students

### About Bass Connections

[Bass Connections](#) is a university-wide program that offers graduate and undergraduate students immersive research opportunities through more than 50 year-long project teams each year. On Bass Connections teams, graduate and professional students, postdocs, and undergraduates work together with faculty and outside experts to conduct cutting-edge research on important issues such as health inequality, environmental sustainability, human rights, educational opportunity, and medical ethics.

Teams generally work together for nine to 12 months. Participating students usually receive academic credit ([see below for crediting options for Law students](#)), although students in specialized roles may sometimes serve in a paid role.

Team members blend their diverse skills and expertise, allowing students of all levels to learn *and* contribute. Their work results in policy recommendations, journal articles, new datasets to inform future research, health interventions, novel modes of delivering social services, prototypes, museum exhibits, future grants, and more.

### Crediting Options for Law Students

Law students who are interested in participating in Bass Connections have the following crediting options:

- **Teams led by a Duke Law Faculty Member:** If a Duke Law faculty member leads a Bass Connections team ([see below](#)), Law students are eligible to receive Law School credit (up to three credits per semester). Upon being accepted to join a team, students must apply for approval to receive Law School credit by documenting the law and policy work (research, drafting, etc.) they will be undertaking as part of the team and the amount of time they will spend on the project. Such students should contact [Dean Lacoff](#) or [James Lambert](#).
- **Teams *without* Duke Law Faculty Members:** Some Bass Connections team are grappling with legal matters but do not include a Duke Law faculty leader. [While Law](#) students are encouraged to participate on these teams, students would not be eligible for Law School credit. Such students could opt to use their non-Law credit, noting that each student is only permitted three such credits. Students may also petition the Law School's Administrative Committee for permission to apply up to three additional credits. Such appeals must demonstrate the rigor of the project and the connection to legal matters. Students interested in participating in these projects should contact [Dean Lacoff](#) or [James Lambert](#).
- **Other options:** Some students participate on Bass Connections teams in a paid capacity, particularly if they are serving in a leadership/project management role on the team. Each team is structured

differently. It is at the discretion of faculty team leaders whether they offer paid roles. Law students may not earn academic credit if they are paid for their work.

Some students also participate on Bass Connections teams in an extra-curricular capacity because they are passionate about the topics, see sufficient professional benefits to participation, and/or because the topic aligns with their own research/career interests.

In some circumstances, Duke Law students may also document leadership or other skill development through a Bass Connections team experience that may count toward the professional development graduation requirement. Please contact a career counselor if you are interested in pursuing this option.

### 2023-2024 Project Teams Eligible for Law School Credit

#### Trauma-Informed Courts: A Public Health Approach to Juvenile Justice

Building on the work of the [2022-2023 project team](#), this team will seek to understand whether judges' employment of trauma-informed methods improves outcomes for youth who are court-involved. Judges have indicated that they would be more likely to adopt trauma-informed practices — and to encourage others to do the same — if they could be armed with such data.

The team will utilize a court observation tool developed by the 2022-2023 team to assess the extent to which a courtroom and specific hearings are trauma-informed. They will conduct court observation visits across the state, focusing on juvenile delinquency court. The team will also learn about the experiences of court-involved youth using surveys and interviews. Following this observation and data collection, team members will analyze their findings with both statistical and qualitative methods.

**Law School faculty leaders:** Amelia Thorn

### 2023-2024 Project Teams Not Eligible for Law School Credit

*Law students are welcome to apply to any of the [teams](#) that are currently recruiting new students.*

### Benefits of Participation for Professional Students

Project teams offer professional students an exciting opportunity to apply coursework to a concrete problem, access professional development resources, expand academic and professional networks, and build career-enhancing skills to stand out on the job market. Professional students play a crucial role on Bass Connections teams, often serving as subject area experts, project managers or sub-group leaders, and mentors for undergraduates. In recognition of the important leadership role that professional students play on teams, Bridget Eklund JD' 21 was awarded the 2021 [Bass Connections Award for Outstanding Mentorship](#).

Bass Connections teams offer professional students the opportunity to plan and implement complex projects, work in teams, mentor and lead others, and communicate across boundaries to find solutions to complex challenges — skills that are crucial for successful careers in almost any field.

## Duke Law Participation and Testimonials

Past Law students have participated on a wide range of teams, including those working on issues related to ethics, the environment, privacy and security, intellectual property, labor, health, and education.

Among many research outcomes, these teams have:

- collaborated with federal and state policymakers on Medicaid reform;
- developed cybersecurity guidelines to protect individuals' and families' personal data;
- examined incentive-based approaches to endangered species conservation on private lands;
- explored how governments and professional associations set and enforce codes of ethics in competitive industries such as law, athletics and business;
- produced documentary films on the environment and peacebuilding in post-conflict zones; and
- written policy proposals to inform animal waste management practices in the United States.

Here's what a few Duke Law alumni have had to say about their Bass Connections experience:

*The best thing about my Bass Connections project was that, much like in the real world, the "problem" we sought to address had never been answered – it was not an assignment generated to test a skill set, but rather a totally open-ended question.*

**-Anna Johns Hrom JD '16, PhD '18 (Law Clerk, U.S. Courts)**

*As a result of having worked with a multidisciplinary team, my writing changed and improved my goal of reaching wider audiences...Back in Brazil, my experience with Bass Connections is also informing how I am building and leading teams of researchers and policy analysts.*

**-Daniel Ribeiro, SJD '18 (Prosecutor, Ministério Público of the State of Rio de Janeiro)**

*Through Bass Connections, I had the chance to meet with highly specialized practitioners that have been doing fascinating work on environmental peacebuilding. The [experience] also gave me an opportunity to step out of my usual activities...and do things I had little experience with, like drafting a script for a documentary or thinking about how certain images might help communicate the environmental impact of armed conflict in different regions of the world.*

**-Xiao Recio-Blanco, SJD '15 (Director of the Ocean Program, Environmental Law Institute)**

*Bass Connections provided [our team] with an opportunity to work across disciplines to solve a complex and multifaceted problem and to develop a meaningful solution to that problem—one that has the potential to have tangible benefits in the real world. It is exactly the type of opportunity that I had been looking for when I decided to apply to Duke in the first place: to take my education beyond the classroom to make a difference in the wider world.*

**-Matthew Phillips JD '20 (Founder, Phillips Admissions)**