



NIU College of Law Clinic Clips

October 2018

VOLUME 1/ISSUE 2

CLINICAL PROGRAM MISSION

Our mission is to provide hands-on learning opportunities for law students to advocate on behalf of real clients under the supervision of clinical faculty, who are experienced lawyers. Through the clinic's commitment to social justice and providing free legal services, our students' advocacy and hard work can dramatically improve the life circumstances of people in need.

CIVIL JUSTICE CLINIC RECEIVES ISBA EXCELLENCE IN LEGAL EDUCATION AWARD

The Northern Illinois University College of Law's Civil Justice Clinic was honored by the Illinois State Bar Association with its 2018 *Excellence in Legal Education Award*. Established by the ISBA's Committee on Legal Education, Admissions and Competence, this annual award recognizes a law school program that serves as an example of excellence in the practice of law; demonstrates records of exceptional advocacy, leadership and dedication; and significantly advances the cause of access to quality legal representation.

"It is a tremendous honor for the NIU Law Civil Justice Clinic to be recognized by the Illinois State Bar Association with the *Excellence in Legal Education Award*," said Clinical Associate Professor Wendy Vaughn, who has taught the Clinic since its creation in 2012. "Our students and post-graduate legal fellows develop critical legal skills while serving the needs of clients who have experienced trauma and who fear for their safety and their children's safety on a daily basis," she added.

Under Professor Vaughn's direction, students in the Civil Justice Clinic provide holistic legal services to clients by drafting estate-planning documents and counseling elderly adults, as well as by litigating order of protection cases for survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. In addition to providing representation to individual clients, the Clinic collaborates closely with community agencies and advocates for systemic changes that increase access to justice, supportive services, and critical resources for its clients.

Vaughn, the Civil Justice Clinic is a recognized leader in the Winnebago County legal community," said Cordes. "She has developed strong community partnerships and collaborations as well as a supportive, educational, and student-focused learning environment."

CRIMINAL DEFENSE CLINIC (ROCKFORD)

The Criminal Defense Clinic students are working on various motions such as bond modification, various discovery motions and to allow out-of-state DUI assessment and treatment; are engaging in plea negotiations and preparing for a bench trial. Mike Biggott has summarized his experience so far as follows: "The Criminal Defense Clinic has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to acquire hands-on experience in criminal procedure and dealing with clients. An opportunity that simply cannot be found in a classroom setting." Emily Crutchfield has this to say about her experience: "My clinic experience so far has taught me more about dealing with clients and client centered lawyering than any other experience I've had throughout law school. We get to take on the case fairly independently and really learn the ins and outs of the criminal justice system." Avi Fagan has this to say about his experience: "I have three clients, each with distinct challenges, personalities and cases. Working on their cases has been a very rewarding experience. It's energizing to do the work of a lawyer, appear in front of real judges in court and have meaningful interactions with clients."

CIVIL JUSTICE CLINIC (ROCKFORD)

Civil Justice students Justine Alfaro, Brian Fernandez, Jed McClure, Devin Taseff, Aaron Vanagaitis, and Victor Zamora are busy drafting estate planning documents, negotiating settlements, and preparing for order of protection hearings this semester. Here's some of what they have to say about the Civil Justice Clinic this semester:

- "It is a great first step to practice, you get to actually have your own clients to help."
- "This is where your law school experience 'gets real.' You have to be ready to work hard and be invested in the work that you're doing. Real people are counting on us to do a good job."
- "I really enjoy feeling like a real attorney. From the moment you walk into the legal clinic it's like a switch that goes off because you know that you are now fully responsible for your client and the outcome of their case relies on your work."

Students in the Civil Justice Clinic feel like they are making a difference for their clients:

- "The Civil Justice Clinic has been one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had in law school. One of the greatest feelings has been being able to hear our client say thank you to us for being on their side when no one else has ever been there for them. We all know and understand that the legal system isn't perfect so it's great to be able to give a client a real sense of justice."
- "I enjoy being able to help others. We get to really make a difference. Our clients are always really happy when they can get an order of protection. Even the clients we do wills for truly enjoy working with us. It feels great to help others out."

Students describe working with clients in the Civil Justice Clinic as "an incredibly eye-opening experience" and like "being thrown into the fire 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥 and getting the experience." Overall, one student sums up the Clinic as a "10/10 experience. Would 100% recommend."

HEALTH ADVOCACY CLINIC (AURORA)

Riley Gallagher describes her most memorable moment as seeing "a mother and her two sleeping children at Hesed House one of the first days at the clinic. It didn't exactly click how important the work that we would be doing was until I saw firsthand what it was like to be a homeless family." Among other skills, Riley has learned "to communicate effectively with the clients and to gather the necessary facts to develop a successful case going forward." Alivia Hatten's most memorable moment was speaking "to a cafeteria filled with about 70 homeless clients of Hesed House about Powers of Attorney for Health Care and why it is important to have one." Afterwards she "realized the amazing experience I had been given to speak to a captive audience regarding a tool that could help them." Her experience has taught her "how to deal with the not so exciting things that come with being a lawyer such as handling an unhappy client." Rachael Clark-McCarthy's most memorable moment was "meeting my client for the first time and running in the rain when I needed her signature." It has given her "the benefit of perspective and an appreciation for the commonality of all suffering and joy." Her experience has taught her that "a little advocacy, compassion, and ambition goes a long way. Never underestimate the impact that you may have on that world, on a life, because of all the little things you do and have done." Jaclyn Sweeney most memorable moment was learning "that [her] client had been approved for Social Security benefits. I don't think I could even describe how happy I was." Among the lessons she learned is that "there is no such thing as a 'typical' day and you need to be ready for anything."

PRISONER RIGHTS PROJECT (ROCKFORD)

The Prisoner's Rights Project is in full swing and we have been very busy interviewing our clients at both Dixon Correctional Center and Danville Correctional Center. Rebecca McCorkle, one of the clinic students presented her client for deposition at Danville Correctional Center last week. Rebecca properly prepared her client for the deposition and made several well thought out objections during the three hour deposition. Rebecca had this to say after the deposition: "The Prisoner's Rights Project has taken all the knowledge NIU Law taught me from the last two years and applied it to a real-life case. Not only has the PRP given me practical hands-on experience, but it has challenged and built skills that classrooms cannot teach. Learning how to speak with opposing counsel and judges gives me confidence in my ability as a young attorney to effectively, efficiently and ethically navigate the legal."

Alonte Holliday and Jamie Bellah have teamed up to represent their client in an excessive force case that is nearing the close of discovery. Depositions of the named defendants and two fact witnesses remain. We have conducted

mock depositions that have gone well. Alonte has summarized his thoughts about the program thus far as follows: “The work I am doing with the Prisoner’s Rights Project is rewarding in so many ways. I am learning invaluable real life lawyering skills all while helping someone who truly needs my help, This program is helping to mold me into the lawyer I want to be and I enjoy learning from Professor Jensen every day.”

Finally, Loryn Scott and Robert Bulanda are working hard representing their client in an excessive force case that has presented some challenging issues with regard to missing evidence. They are exploring discovery into what tape recordings are routinely made at the prison, how long those recordings are preserved and what the ramifications may be if those tapes are not preserved. Robert has commented that the Prisoner’s Rights Project has given him “hands-on experience with many different aspects of civil litigation” and “fosters a greater understanding of litigation of constitutional issues in Federal Court.” Loryn states that “being part of the Prisoner’s Rights Project has been a great way to gain legal experience and remind me of why I began my journey through law school.”

We will be continuing to work up the cases with the goal of trial in late April or May of next year.

CLINICAL PROGRAM STAFF



Lucy Galpin, Office Manager

Lucy is in her 5th year at NIU—the first 3 years in the Geology Department and currently at the Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic where she handles day-to-day operations. Having gone to court pro se, and winning her case, Lucy has an appreciation of the complexity of the legal system. She received her master’s degree from Roosevelt University in Chicago. She has a background in marketing, communication, graphic design and office management. She has 7 children and 6 grandchildren. She loves to travel—especially spur of the moment road trips. She spends her free time doing photography, art, writing and baking. What is most important to Lucy is spending time with family and friends. Little known facts: Lucy was the officiant for her daughter Victoria’s wedding; is an amateur raw powerlifter holding state, national, and world records.



Willa MacVenn, Office Support Associate

Willa has been working hard at the NIU Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic for over 10 years. She has exceptional knowledge on the workings within the Clinic. She enjoys helping those who help others. Willa received her education at El Camino College in California and Notre Dame College in New Hampshire. Prior to NIU she worked at Rosecrance in the long term unit helping adolescent girls. She has two sons and two granddaughters. In her spare time, she loves to read a wide variety of genre. Willa is a dedicated member of several local book clubs. Other interests include knitting, gardening and attending meetings at the Alzheimer’s Association. She is an excellent chef and enjoys entertaining friends. Willa travels to see family whenever she gets a chance. Little known facts: Willa has lived on both coasts and is the best sconer maker in Rockford.



Kaitlin King-3L; 7/11 Spring 2018; Graduate Assistant 2018-2019

Kaitlin is a 3L and is currently a graduate assistant at the NIU Health Advocacy Clinic (HAC). In the Spring of 2018, she participated in the clinic as a student. She represented a client in front of an Administrative Law Judge and recently found out that her client was approved for Social Security disability benefits. As a result, her client and children can stay living away from Hesed House (the homeless shelter where the clinic is located). Kaitlin's time at the clinic has been one of her most memorable and rewarding experiences in law school. It has taught her many valuable skills that she knows will transfer well into her future career. Kaitlin states that "this clinic is such an important part of the community it serves because regardless of age, race, or socioeconomic status, everyone deserves the opportunity to be heard. The Health Advocacy Clinic provides the resources necessary to help these individuals."

In the Fall of 2018, Kaitlin returned to the HAC as a graduate assistant. She enjoys working beside the staff and case managers at Hesed House and appreciates the opportunity to see the HAC from a different perspective.