



Northern Illinois University

Your Future. Our Focus.

NIU College of Law Clinic Clips

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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.

ADJUNCT CLINICAL PROFESSOR LISA JENSEN APPOINTED AS U. S. MAGISTRATE JUDGE FOR NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS, WESTERN DIVISION

Adjunct Clinical Professor, Lisa Jensen, was recently selected as the new magistrate judge for the Northern District of Illinois. Jensen will fill the newly-added magistrate judge position in the Western Division in Rockford. Prof. Jensen taught the newly created Prisoners' Rights Project this past academic year.

She is the first woman to serve as a judicial officer in the court's Western Division.

"We weren't really surprised to learn that Professor Jensen had been appointed to be a federal magistrate judge," associate dean for Academic Affairs and NIU

College of Law professor, Marc Falkoff, said. "The outstanding legal credentials we look for in our instructors are the same kinds of skills you want in someone on the bench."

Mark Cordes, NIU College of Law interim dean, shared the sentiment.

"Lisa Jensen is an excellent choice for U.S. magistrate and we're excited that she received this highly prestigious appointment," Cordes said.

"I am confident that Ms. Jensen will be an outstanding addition to our Court. Adding Ms. Jensen to our Rockford bench will provide much-needed assistance to our Court's Western Division," said Chief Judge Rubén Castillo.

CLINIC ALUMNI STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

HEALTH ADVOCACY CLINIC (AURORA)



Hailey Rehbergh Witt

When did you graduate from NIU COL?

I graduated from NIU COL in May 2015.

Describe your career path since graduation.

Right after taking the July bar exam, I began working as a research attorney for the Third District Appellate Court in Ottawa, IL, where I currently work. My job primarily entails discussing cases and drafting orders and opinions for the justices of our appellate court.

What clinic(s) did you participate in?

I participated in the Health Advocacy Clinic both semesters my 3L year (Fall 2014 and Spring 2015). It was one of the best experiences I had during law school.

How did your clinic experience impact your legal career?

Participation in the clinic impacted my legal career in two very important ways. First, I have always found that I am able to explain myself better in writing than verbally. However, working at the clinic, I had to verbally communicate with my clients in order to obtain the information from them that I needed as well as explain the process and law in a way that they would understand. Now as I work, I use these skills to explain my position on a case to the justices or other attorneys in my office in a succinct way. Second, Colleen, through the clinic class, taught us the importance of professional self-care. I learned firsthand at the clinic how a legal career can be challenging and put a toll on us mentally and emotionally. Learning this early on before my career began has really been beneficial as I have learned what my stressors are and my bodily responses to stress. I know that when things are piling up or I feel overwhelmed, my heart starts racing, and I get a little jittery. However, I also know that a few deep breaths, listening to a comedian on my way home, or reading something light and fun help me to reduce this stress. These coping mechanisms have helped to prevent me from feeling burned out.

What is your best memory of your clinic experience?

I don't know if I can name just one best memory from the clinic! I really enjoyed the time we spent at Hesed House. We served lunch a few times and spoke to the residents there. We also

held a Power of Attorney Day and were able to help many people draft Powers of Attorney for Health Care.

Would you recommend taking a clinic to current law students? Why?

I would absolutely recommend taking a clinic to current law students. It is an entirely different experience from interning at a firm or other office. I had many jobs throughout law school, but the clinic was the only one where I felt like I was actually helping people. I had actual clients and did real work to help them. Moreover, by having a professor there to coach you and help you reflect on your work, you really learn a lot about working with clients and about yourself.



Heather Skrip

When did you graduate from NIU COL?

I graduated in May of 2016.

Describe your career path since graduation.

After graduation, I served as an AmeriCorps VISTA at the HAC (Health Advocacy Clinic) from September 2016 through September 2017 and then one week later started at Prairie State Legal Services in Rockford. I have been at Prairie State since that time.

What clinic(s) did you participate in?

I participated in the HAC for two semesters.

How did your clinic experience impact your legal career?

I gained a lot of hands-on experience working with an underserved population, which poses unique challenges including difficulty establishing rapport and maintaining contact. I continue to work with this population and were it not for my experience at the HAC, I would not be as understanding to these issues or as committed to representing this population that is constantly disregarded. I also still chart medical records the same way that I did as a clinic student. This is the best way to consolidate stacks and stacks of medical records and to determine what is most important to bring out in a brief or a hearing.

What is your best memory of your clinic experience?

My favorite memory is meeting with my first client. I was so nervous! This was nowhere near the best meeting I have conducted with a client, but it was the starting point for me in what would become my career as a legal aid attorney.

Would you recommend taking a clinic to current law students? Why?

I would *absolutely* recommend taking a clinic. Clinics are the best way to get firsthand experience conducting intakes, building cases, and representing clients. No matter what you do after law school, these are essential foundations for any legal career. The clients the clinics serve will also challenge you, but mainly open your eyes to issues that you might not be familiar with.

CRIMINAL DEFENSE CLINIC (ROCKFORD)



Jason Tempin

When did you graduate from NIU COL?

May, 2016

Describe your career path since graduation.

After being sworn in to the IL Bar in Mid-November, 2016, I began working part-time as a research assistant and coverage attorney for a small general practice firm in Belvidere, IL. Within 2 months, I was hired as a Public Defender in Winnebago County. After about 9 months, I transitioned to my current firm, Wiedner & McAuliffe, and have been defending employers in workers' compensation matters since October, 2017.

What clinic(s) did you participate in?

Juvenile Justice Clinic (2 semesters), Adult Criminal Defense Clinic (1 semester)

How did your clinic experience impact your legal career?

I was able to leverage the clinical experience I gained as a law student during interviews and perhaps more importantly, I was able to "hit the ground running" at the PD's office because I was comfortable negotiating with prosecutors and I was no longer nervous while at the bench when speaking with the judge.

What is your best memory of your clinic experience?

Hearing the Judge grant a client's Petition and seeing the relief and joy on their face. Being able to make a real difference in people's lives, while still being a student, was very motivating for me.

Would you recommend taking a clinic to current law students? Why?

Absolutely! I recommend taking the same clinic more than once, or taking different clinics to be exposed to different areas of law. The practical, hands-on experience that you gain from any of the NIU clinics is arguably more impactful than anything taught during 1L year (that is, after you pass the bar).



Brad Fuller

When did you graduate from NIU COL?

May 2010

Describe your career path since graduation.

I began my career by clerking for the Hon. Paul Biebel Jr., the presiding judge of the Cook County criminal courts. I then accepted a position as an assistant public defender in Stephenson County, Illinois. After nearly eight years as an APD I left to study international criminal law at the United Nations Research Institute in Torino, Italy. Upon my return to Chicago in 2017 I joined a prominent litigation firm in Chicago's loop, Illinois Advocates, where I am currently an associate.

What clinic(s) did you participate in?

I participated in the criminal defense clinic.

How did your clinic experience impact your legal career?

I developed a passion for helping people and protecting constitutional rights. The clinic provided me with the nuts and bolts skills of litigation and the confidence I needed to obtain a job upon graduation.

What is your best memory of your clinic experience?

I'll never forget the first time a client shook my hand and thanked me for fighting on his behalf.

Would you recommend taking a clinic to current law students? Why?

Absolutely. The legal clinic is the best way to obtain the practical skills necessary to truly become a lawyer.

CIVIL JUSTICE CLINIC (ROCKFORD)



Patti Hall

When did you graduate from NIU COL?

May, 2016

Describe your career path since graduation.

I worked under Professor Wendy Vaughn at the Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic as the Illinois Bar Foundation Fellow for one year after sitting for the Illinois bar exam. I currently work as an associate attorney at Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen in Rockford where I was hired following completion of my fellowship in August, 2017.

What clinic(s) did you participate in?

I participated in the Civil Justice Clinic while I was a law student at NIU.

How did your clinic experience impact your legal career?

My experience at the Clinic made a phenomenal impact on my career in many ways I am still realizing. It provided a foundation for much of what I am able to do as an attorney now. It shaped my perspective with regard to availability of legal services. It allowed me to overcome the expected initial insecurities of beginning my practice in law by providing hands-on experience - experience not many law students or first-year attorneys are provided. I counseled clients, participated in motion practice, and appeared and argued before judges. I also learned an invaluable amount of personal practice skills, including time management, compassion, and the importance of maintaining a high standard in everything I do.

What is your best memory of your clinic experience?

While the Clinic provided the very valuable hands-on, real-life legal experience, my best memory is of the fact that a professor and respected attorney invested her time and energy into assuring that I learned as much as I possibly could during the time I spent at the Clinic. I was able to develop the confidence that I was capable of becoming a talented attorney because of the confidence that Professor/Attorney Vaughn placed on me while I was under her guidance.

Would you recommend taking a clinic to current law students? Why?

I think every student should participate in at least one clinic semester. What you will find, is that so much of how you learn to practice law is through actually doing the work. The NIU clinics are a fantastic way to do that. The clinics will allow you to “get your feet” wet, while providing the security of having someone to guide you through each step. You also have the opportunity through our clinics to learn from some of the most talented people you will encounter as you

begin your career. I was provided one-on-one legal skills training, which is very rare once you are out of school. The clinic experience is a must for every student.



Irakere Picon

When did you graduate from NIU COL?

I graduated in 2015.

Describe your career path since graduation.

After graduation, I worked at the Community Activism Law Alliance and the Chicago Law and Education Foundation as a part-time staff attorney at each organization. I was then hired at the National Immigrant Justice Center as the first staff attorney under the City of Chicago's Legal Protection Fund providing free legal services to low-income immigrants. Most recently, I began working at the Illinois Business Immigration Coalition as the Director of Legal Services.

What clinic(s) did you participate in?

I participated in the Civil Justice Clinic.

How did your clinic experience impact your legal career?

Participating in the clinic gave me my first opportunity to directly represent clients. I learned to conduct intakes with clients from different walks of life and learned that it is important set expectations early on in the representation.

What is your best memory of your clinic experience?

I wouldn't say this was the best experience from a personal perspective but from a professional perspective, I worked with a client from Eastern Europe who had been affected by World War II and was looking to create a will for her property. Unfortunately, the client had severe mental health issues and would often have emotional breakdowns and sometime forget certain things. It was certainly a difficult case to take on as a law student.

Would you recommend taking a clinic to current law students? Why?

Absolutely, participating in the clinic and other extracurricular classes was the closest I was able to replicating practicing law with actual clients. Although you learn case law and how to go through a case analysis, you don't get the hands-on experience that you do in a clinic.