McGeorge Ranks in Top 20 for Best Schools for Practical Training

The National Jurist recently ranked McGeorge 18th in its annual honor roll of best schools for practical training, giving the school a grade of “A.” The publication’s methodology placed the most weight on clinical experience. McGeorge’s eight legal clinics are honored to be part of this recognition.

Thank You Associate Dean Landsberg

The legal clinics extend their gratitude to Dorothy Landsberg ’87 for her vision, inspiration, energy and dedication to social justice. As her assignment as our first Associate Dean for Experiential Learning comes to a close, we look forward to her return to the trenches at the legal clinics.

Prisoner Civil Rights Clinic Report

Students in the Prisoner Rights Mediation Clinic co-mediate Section 1983 prisoner civil rights cases with federal magistrate judges at the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California. Under Section 1983, state prisoners may file a civil rights complaint seeking relief for alleged violations of their rights under the United States Constitution or federal statutes. Most of the cases students co-mediate involve prisoner claims related to excessive use of force, a failure to protect, a refusal to provide the prisoner with adequate medical care, an infringement on his right to free exercise of religion, or retaliation.

Students delve into the theory and practice of mediation and develop a working knowledge of section 1983 prisoner civil rights law. Students interview prisoners two weeks prior to each mediation and draft a pre-mediation bench memorandum for the magistrate judge. Students then meet and confer with the judge at federal court and co-mediate the case. In the spring 2017 semester, students have participated in four mediations, all of which settled.

Meet Alumni Jason R. Holley ’14, Holley Criminal Defense

Federal Defender Clinic

The McGeorge Federal Defender Clinic was the launching pad for my career in criminal defense. Over the course of one year, I tried two federal misdemeanor trials, handled over 80 cases, and made incredible relationships with judges, attorneys, and fellow colleagues. Upon passing the bar exam, I was able to start my own private criminal defense practice with the ease and confidence only the McGeorge Federal Defender Clinic could provide. There is no substitute to being in court weekly and trying criminal cases beginning to end. As a current member of the Federal Bar, I cannot speak highly enough of the Federal Defender Clinic. I continue to use the knowledge, tactical skills, and case strategy obtained from the clinic in my day-to-day practice. In short, the clinic was not only my best law school experience; it has also proved to be the most valuable.

-Jason R. Holley
Administrative Adjudication Clinic
Meet Alumni Tiffany Hiramine ’15 and KB Teh ’15

Tiffany Hiramine and KB Teh enrolled in the Administrative Adjudication Clinic as 2Ls in 2014, believing that the clinic offered a unique opportunity to view facts and law as a neutral, as opposed to an advocate. While conducting parking citation appeal hearings they met with contestants, made findings of fact, interpreted the law, and issued written decisions. In addition to the law, they also learned how to effectively run hearings while dealing with a variety of people and situations.

After the clinic, they kept their adjudicating skills sharp by working as part-time parking citation appeals hearing officers with McGeorge’s Institute for Administrative Justice (IAJ). Because of their experience with the clinic and their exceptional performance rendering well-written and legally sound decisions, after graduating, they found full-time jobs at IAJ as hearing officers. They now hear Welfare and Institutions Code involuntary commitment hearings. While they rarely hear parking citation appeals now, they would not be as proficient without their experience gained in the Administrative Adjudication Clinic.

Bankruptcy Clinic

Under the direction of Supervising Attorney, Professor Warren Jones ’75, students in the Bankruptcy Clinic assist low-income clients in getting their lives back on track. Here’s what students say about their clinic experience.

While working in the clinic, I use the knowledge that I gained in the Bankruptcy class and put it to practical use with my own cases and clients. My knowledge of the law has expanded as have my legal skills. While some clients may have similar issues, I have been able to address their individual needs with professionalism and confidence. Helping real people by providing legal advice and representation in a difficult time in their lives stands out as the best experience you can have as you prepare for your future. Although the actual legal work for a client is among the best experience I have gained in law school, the opportunity to work with diverse clients has been the most personally rewarding.

Kyle Kerkhoff ’17

My client came into the bankruptcy clinic seeking help to discharge a large judgment against him that resulted from an unfortunate accident. This young single-father was the sole provider for his one-year-old child. He was working to turn his life around and hoped bankruptcy could provide him such an avenue. He went through great lengths to make every meeting, including bringing his child with him on occasion. He had a few small part-time jobs during the process and even lost his driver license due to the judgment. However, even this was not enough to stop him. He rode his bike to the clinic, at night after work and in the rain, went through great lengths to make every meeting, including bringing his child with him on occasion. He had a few small part-time jobs during the process and even lost his driver license due to the judgment. However, even this was not enough to stop him. He rode his bike to the clinic, at night after work and in the rain, in order to proceed with his case. With my help, his driver license was restored and he received the fresh start that will allow him to build a life for him and his son. Being able to put my legal training and skills to work reminds me of why I went to law school.

Joshua Khatemi ’17

Elder & Health Law

The Elder & Health Law Clinic is comprised of a highly motivated team of students, supervised by Professor Melissa Brown. From drafting basic wills and trusts, representation in consumer and civil rights protection matters, denials of public benefits and health care and to elder abuse litigation in superior court, students provide legal assistance to the most vulnerable members of our community who would not receive help otherwise.

In the last few years, the clinic has expanded its footprint to take on more demanding cases. The clinic team has recently settled a case for a 90-year-old Portuguese immigrant in a lawsuit against her niece. The law suit alleged that her niece exerted undue influence and abused a power of attorney, resulting in over $100,000 being misappropriated or otherwise unaccounted for and that she was manipulated into signing a deed which transferred a joint tenancy interest. On the eve of trial, the case settled. Title of the home was re-conveyed and substantial money was returned.

Here’s what Mark G. Doronio ’17 says about his experience: “This case encapsulated many of the skills needed to practice Elder Law, testing many of the lessons taught in Professor Brown’s Elder Law and Social Policy class. The Elder & Health Law Clinic is an opportunity for McGeorge students to experience all aspects of civil litigation practice, and is right across the street from campus. Students manage caseloads, interact with clients, interact with attorneys, answer discovery, take depositions, advocate before a judge, and potentially try a high stakes lawsuit. The Clinic provides invaluable services to elders who would never find a remedy to their harm. The Clinic gives our community a route to become whole, while providing a supervised, yet aggressive, environment for McGeorge law students to grow from student to practicing lawyer.”
**Legislative and Public Policy Clinic**

The Legislative & Public Policy Clinic, supervised by Professor Rex Frazier ’00, has been hard at work this year. Since the Fall semester of 2016, clinic students have been identifying and addressing problems with state law and developing public policy responses. This year's clinic work has resulted in the introduction of four bills which are:

**AB 413 (Eggman):** Allows survivors of domestic violence to record their abuse and submit those recordings as evidence in a court proceeding without fear of being sued by the abusive party for invasion of privacy. (Students: Lilliana Udang, Jessica Gosney, Charles Wiseman)

**SB 350 (Galgiani):** Ensures continuity of care of inmates by requiring their electronic health records to follow them to a new facility. (Students: Melerie Michael, Elizabeth Vice)

**SB 791 (Glazer):** Requires institutions of higher education to disclose more information on the status of student loan repayments to prospective students. (Students: Elizabeth Vice, Ryan Mahoney, Jordan Catalano)

**AB 90 (Weber):** Reforms the CalGang shared gang database program. (Students: Louie Ponce, Nicholas Scheuer)

One additional measure under development is the regulation of bouncers, spearheaded by students Caitriona McOsker and Brandon Chaidez.

After three years in operation, nine of the fourteen clinic bills have made it through the Legislature, with eight receiving Governor Brown’s signature and becoming law. Fingers crossed for this year’s clinic students.

**Immigration Law Clinic**

In the Immigration Law Clinic, students provide representation and counsel to noncitizens in the Sacramento area living at or below the poverty level. Each student, certified by the California State Bar, acts as counsel for their clients under the supervision of Professor Blake Nordahl. Students conduct initial consultations, make assessments regarding eligibility, provide legal advice, and lead the representation of their clients in a range of matters before various administrative immigration agencies including United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Immigration Court.

The Immigration Clinic, established in 2000, has a strong record of working with particularly vulnerable individuals including undocumented survivors of crimes of violence. The clinic also works with unaccompanied children who fled their home countries due to persecution or abuse. These cases allow students to represent their clients in family and guardianship proceedings in State civil court as well as USCIS and the Immigration Court.

This spring, students responded to the high level of concern in the community regarding increased immigration enforcement by expanding outreach events. Students provided free consultations and follow up to students and parents on site at a local high school throughout the semester. In addition, Joey Campbell, Tania Dominguez, Monserrat Garcia, Isabel Glaese, and Jennifer Wang led a community presentation on legal rights on March 30th. The topics included rights and responsibilities when confronted by immigration officers, how to prepare for immigration court, and how to protect children and assets if detained or deported. In the Immigration Clinic, students empower their clients through their advocacy and through the process are empowered themselves.

**Small Business Clinic**

The Small Business Law Clinic (SBLCL) and Seminar, supervised by Professors Elizabeth Jackson ’10 and Kaitlyn Saberin ’10, continued in Spring 2017. The SBLCL provides students with business transactional experience and supports small businesses in the local community with legal services. Housed in the law firm of Delfino, Madden, O’Malley, Coyle and Koewler, students focus on issues that lawyers encounter in a business or corporate practice, from checking conflicts and preparing engagement letters, advising on entity formation, the formalities of entity formation and drafting organizational documents, and negotiating various agreements such as leases, intellectual property licenses, vendor, and employment contracts.

This semester the students also worked through these same issues for a local nonprofit public benefit corporation, and were introduced to the nuances that come with being a tax-exempt organization. Students utilized basic business and transactional legal skills, having learned what resources to consult, how to review documents, and key issues to be mindful of in various types of transactions for the clients. The SBLCL continues to endeavor to fill a critical need in the economic development of the local community.
At a time of transition, many constants remain--first and foremost of which is McGeorge’s commitment to social justice and the role that all legal clinic students play in fulfilling this commitment. For over 40 years our legal clinics have had a significant impact on our community. From individual counseling and transactional needs, to legal representation in civil, criminal, and administrative courts, McGeorge legal clinic students are there. From advocacy affecting broad public policy change, to adjudicating and mediating disputes, McGeorge legal clinic students are there. The professionalism, dedication, competency and passion for the law demonstrated by our students is simply extraordinary.

Speaking of extraordinary, this aptly describes the support of clinical education by Dean Jay Mootz. As he moves to a full-time faculty role, I know he will continue to be a strong role model and mentor. Thank you, Dean Mootz. As we welcome incoming Dean Michael Hunter Schwartz, I know that the law school’s commitment to clinical legal education will continue as strong as ever.

-MELISSA BROWN, Legal Clinics Director and Supervising Attorney, Elder & Health Law Clinic

Meet Alumni Lauren Foust Sorokolit ’13, Associate General Counsel, Molina Healthcare

During her second and third year at McGeorge, Lauren Foust Sorokolit participated in the Elder and Health Law Clinic. Lauren is now Associate General Counsel at Molina Healthcare, a national health plan focused on government-sponsored healthcare programs including Medicaid, Medicare, dual-eligible, and Marketplace. Lauren’s practice focuses on health plan licensing and Medicaid State Fair Hearings. She also handles Medicaid Fair Hearings for Molina members in all states regarding health plan coverage disputes.

Lauren reports that the Clinic gave her the tools she needed to take on a position with Molina Healthcare. In the Clinic, she had the opportunity to work on a broad range of issues ranging from estate planning to elder abuse. During her second year in the clinic, as part of her research, Lauren began to regularly consult with the national Center for Medicare Advocacy. She applied for a summer position and was accepted as an intern with its Washington, D.C. office. During her third year, Lauren had the opportunity to use this Medicare experience to help a Medicare beneficiary obtain out of network medical benefits.

As an attorney, Lauren still uses skills that she gained in the Elder and Health Law Clinic. In the Clinic, Lauren regularly worked with clients to determine the nature of their legal issues and whether there were any creative solutions to those issues. As a health plan attorney, she employs the same skills to help find a solution that is good for both the member and the health plan.

Meet Alumni Matt Nemerson ’13, Fresno County Public Defender’s Office

When Matthew Nemerson was growing up, his parents worked to instill in him the importance of public service and social justice. “My mom was a social worker and she always told about the importance of helping those less fortunate than us,” says Nemerson. He joined Fresno County in September 2014 as a deputy public defender, managing a caseload of more than 200 clients and 20 jury trials so far, of which 11 were felonies. He credits McGeorge with putting him there.

“I was interested in social justice and I wanted to go into criminal law. I wanted to be in the courtroom,” he adds. Nemerson cites key coursework at McGeorge and experience in the Elder & Health Law Clinic in making him a law school graduate that was attractive to employers.

“The clinic was an essential law school experience. I got to help people, get actual law experience, learned case management, and it was just an eye-opening experience,” says Nemerson. “You get small class sizes and one-on-one interaction with professors who actually care about you. The takeaway is the interactive experience they give you—it builds confidence.”

Matt’s words of wisdom: “Make sure the client feels heard, this helps build a bond between attorney and client. Set realistic goals with your clients at the beginning. And join a clinic while in law school! Closest thing to the real practice of law you can get while in law school.”

Summer Job Opportunities

Our three on-campus clinics (Bankruptcy, Immigration and Elder & Health Law) collectively form Community Legal Services (CLS), which has served the community for over 40 years. CLS operates as a law firm 52 weeks out of the year and work study students are integral to our year-round operations. Students will be involved in case work and community lawyering. We expect to continue our Know Your Rights and Family Preparedness Immigration forum and have a grant to take Nal! Is A Complete Sentence elder abuse prevention program, with law students and actors from Capital Stage, on the road. Contact Clinic Director Melissa Brown at mbrown1@pacific.edu.