PILG’s New Public Interest Week Raises $10K for Students Pursuing Public Interest Work

Denver Law’s Public Interest Law Group (PILG) auction may have looked a little different this year, but it was still a major success. Instead of holding one large dinner event, the PILG Auction Board decided to hold an entire week of festivities. Student volunteers sold home-baked goods and promoted auction items, which were generously donated by faculty, staff and community members. The week culminated in a 1980’s dance party at the Denver bar, Hi-Dive, where students, faculty and staff danced to their favorite ‘80s tunes. The evening concluded with a costume contest featuring two winners, Casey Shea, 2L, and Greg Janssen, 2L. The auction, ‘80s dance party and bake sale raised almost $10,000 towards PILG clerkship stipends!

Applications for clerkships are due April 10, 2015. Recipients will be notified by the end of April. Stay tuned for information on the recipients and their proposed work for the summer.

–Jessie Rehms, 2L

New Veterans-Focused Externship to Launch Fall 2015

The Denver Law Veterans Advocacy Project will offer students the opportunity to assist veterans in appealing denied benefits claims, including service-connected benefits, pension benefits, survivor benefits and education benefits. Under attorney supervision, students will have the opportunity to interview clients, analyze medical records, communicate with health care providers, and craft strategies to help clients receive disability and other compensation. These services can have life-changing effects on the veterans served.

If you are interested in learning more, contact lsteele@law.du.edu or attend an information session on April 7, 2015 at 12:00 p.m. Please check the events calendar for room information.

–Senior Lecturer Ann Vessels, director, Legal Externship Program
CIVIL RIGHTS CLINIC

I am so glad that I chose to spend my second year of law school working in the Civil Rights Clinic. It’s hard to express how much I have developed my legal skills, knowledge of the law, and knowledge about myself and the kind of lawyer I want to become in the course of representing a client in federal prison. My case partner, Chelsea Gilbertson, and I spent our first semester building upon the work of previous student attorney teams in the Civil Rights Clinic. Chelsea and I immersed ourselves in the ins and outs of prisoner litigation. We pored over our client’s voluminous medical records, consulted with medical experts and conducted prison visits with our client at least once a month. By the beginning of this semester, we were able to distill our client’s complex medical issues into a complaint alleging an Eighth Amendment violation. It was so rewarding not only to integrate all that we had learned about the law and our client in the complaint, but also to advocate for someone who would not have access to legal counsel otherwise. Now that the complaint has been filed, Chelsea and I are excitedly preparing to begin discovery.

–Emily Miller, 2L

CIVIL RIGHTS CLINIC

Last semester, my team and I litigated against the Department of Corrections in an Eighth Amendment lawsuit. Although the case was dismissed two weeks before our trial in Federal District Court, we created a case theory, drafted direct and cross-examinations, filed numerous briefs and attended a pre-trial conference. The hours were long and the workload was not only intensive, but also incredibly emotionally taxing. When I signed up for the Civil Rights Clinic (CRC) and picked this case, I knew I would work exceptionally hard, but I had no idea how it would affect me: My work in the CRC has changed my views on litigation, made me a better writer and forever changed my legal path. With the guidance of my supervising attorneys and relentless support from my team, I learned the true value of the law and what a career in public interest litigation can accomplish. I saw firsthand how my work could create concrete improvements, and to say I’ve become addicted to the law would be an understatement. I joke that each year Laura Rovner and the other CRC attorneys are creating 10-15 new civil rights attorneys, but truly, they are shaping new critical-thinking lawyers every year. I have finally found my passion in the law, and for the first time, just a few short months before graduation, I’m finally feeling like a lawyer. I will look back on my time in the CRC as fundamentally life-changing, and I encourage any students interested in civil rights and public service to apply.

–Breann Plasters, 3L

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CLINIC

The desire to help people is very common amongst law students. However, when I came to law school, I had a desire to help a different group of people than most of my peers: I wanted to help business owners and the Community Economic Development Clinic has allowed me to do exactly that. I’ve had the opportunity to assist business clients that cannot afford legal services on a variety of transactional matters. After putting in many hours working on a project, it’s very rewarding to see how happy your client is and how much it will help their business. One project that I found especially gratifying was a board governance training presentation that my partner and I gave to our client’s board of directors. It was a great feeling to be able to train our client’s board on the proper way for the business to operate. We spent a lot of time putting the presentation together and practicing it, but it was all worth it to see how satisfied our client was with the presentation. The client will now be more confident that its board of directors is operating in the proper manner, which will allow its business to run more smoothly.

–Tyson Welch, 2L
CIVIL LITIGATION CLINIC

My most recent case in the Civil Litigation Clinic (CLC) has left me feeling very emotionally conflicted. My client in the case was a victim of sexual assault when she was a child. Recently the perpetrator began frequenting the restaurant where my client worked. This obviously caused a great deal of pain and re-traumatization for her, about whom I cared very deeply.

I whole-heartedly believed that my client had suffered terrible sexual abuse as a child and I wanted to help her. Before I went to trial on her case, I thought that the justice system would protect her. In an ideal world, where what is good and right prevails, it was clear that my client deserved protection from her perpetrator. All she wanted was peace of mind to try and heal.

Unfortunately, court and the law are not ideal. I gave my every effort the day of trial, but the protection order was denied. The court stated that the perpetrator’s mere presence at my client’s workplace was not a sufficient basis to grant the protection order.

People say that as long as you give your best that is all that matters, but that wasn’t true in this case. I may have given my best, but that isn’t what matters. What matters is that my client didn’t get the justice she deserves. At the very least, I hope that my client knows that I heard her cry for help, that I believed her, and that I really tried.

-Kylie Wyse, 2L

On the day the case ended, Kylie wrote the following letter to her CLC client.

Dear Client,

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing this email to let you know how much I care. While I know the outcome of your case was disappointing—perhaps devastating—I hope that you know that you are strong and resilient. I truly admire you and the kind, loving, and hardworking person you are. I have never seen anyone be able to maintain such grace and poise while dealing with something so terrible. I am so sorry about what happened to you as a child; it is not fair or right.

I am also very sorry that justice was not served. In an ideal world the law always serves justice to those that deserve it. Unfortunately, court and the law are not ideal. I want you to know I gave my every effort the day of trial. People say that as long as you give your best that is all that matters, but that isn’t true in your case. What matters is that you didn’t get the justice you deserve.

However, I must tell you that I think it’s a victory to be the amazing person you are after everything that has happened. You have survived some of the worst things life throws at people, and you have done more than just survive, you have prevailed. I hope you are proud of yourself for that because I am very proud to have known you. I wish you the best in life because you deserve it more than anyone.

Thanks for letting me represent you.
ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CLINIC

Students in the Environmental Law Clinic (ELC) were given a unique opportunity to work on a case involving one of the nation’s oldest and dirtiest coal-fired power plants west of the Mississippi River—the Navajo Generating Station (NGS).

For over 40 years, this 2,250 Megawatt power plant has emitted harmful air pollutants, damaging visibility and air quality in 11 national parks and wilderness areas, including the iconic Grand Canyon National Park. Pollutants from the NGS also cause serious health problems, such as asthma and even death, for the surrounding Navajo and Hopi communities.

Last summer, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a decision that delays retrofitting the NGS with the best available clean air technology for over 30 years, thereby delaying clean up of these harmful emissions. This decision also delays progress towards renewable energy at the power station and jeopardizes the Navajo and Hopi communities’ ability to transition to a clean energy economy.

ELC students worked directly with To’ Nizhoni Ani, Black Mesa Water Coalition, and Diné Citizens Against Ruining the Environment—organizations based almost entirely in the Navajo Nation—in challenging the EPA’s decision. After traveling to the Navajo Nation to speak with these organizations, students filed a petition to review in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, California last October. Under the guidance of Visiting Assistant Professor Brad Bartlett, ELC students have worked diligently on preparing an opening brief, expected to be filed in March 2015.

—Kelly Ledoux, 2L, and Garrett Davey, 2L
**DU Law Review Hosts Crimmigration Symposium**

On February 6 & 7, 2015, the DU Law Review hosted its annual symposium. This year’s symposium, "Crimmigration: Crossing the Border Between Criminal Law and Immigration Law," explored the convergence of criminal law and immigration law. An increasingly important topic in both politics and the law, issues of crimmigration have continued to occupy the national spotlight. Lawyers, professors, students and community members gathered for the two-day event, which featured six panels and two keynote speakers. The diverse group of attendees was a testament to how important this issue is in our communities.

Scholars and practitioners from around the country discussed emerging trends in the crimmigration system from the use of family detention, to efforts to expand access to counsel, and how these systems of federal immigration enforcement interact with local law enforcement. At the center of these conversations were the human stories of heartbreak and injustice, but also stories of community organizing and legal responses that provide hope in a seemingly broken system.

To view recordings of the symposium, visit the DU Law Review online.

–Lauren Parsons, 3L

(l-r) Visiting Assistant Professor César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, University of Denver Sturm College of Law; Associate Professor Nancy Leong, University of Denver Sturm College of Law; Associate Professor Anil Kalhan, Drexel University School of Law; Professor Amanda Frost, American University Washington College of Law; and Assistant Professor Margaret Kwoka, University of Denver Sturm College of Law.
Analyzing the Law Through a Racial Justice Lens: An Occasion for Growth

Law school offers plenty of opportunities to discuss legal topics that are intellectually rigorous. Unfortunately, there are times when hard topics—race, class, gender and sexuality—arise and the discussion grows stale. Sometimes people just don’t have the analytical framework or cultural context to engage in these hard conversations in an educated manner. People would rather not comment than risk putting their foot in their mouths. The organizers of the discussion series saw this problem and imagined the series, “Analyzing the Law through a Racial Justice Lens,” as a solution. Sponsored by the student groups American’s for Civil Liberties Union and the Black Law Students Association, with support from the Rocky Mountain Collective on Race, Place and Law, the series was launched in February and has been ongoing throughout the spring semester.

The series attacks this issue on two fronts: first, it brings in professors with expertise in hard topics relating to race and the law and gives them a platform to share their passion and wisdom with the students in a lecture-style format. The series then gives the students an opportunity to discuss what they have learned from the lectures in a more intimate setting. Topics for the series have included race and reproductive rights, race and immigration, and a follow up on the crisis in Ferguson, Missouri.

This series operates as a catalyst for uncommon discussion and a seed for reflective thought. The organizers of the series believe that the answers to hard questions will not come unless people engage in hard conversations. The goal has been to foster spaces for those conversations to thrive. Hopefully out of these efforts, solutions will arise.

—Shaquille Turner, 2L

A New Way to Take a Vacation: Denver Law Students Give Back on Spring Break Trips

ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK

Seven Denver Law students traveled from Colorado to El Paso, Texas to spend spring break volunteering and learning about life in a border community through the Sturm College of Law’s annual Alternative Spring Break program. Students volunteered at Paso del Norte Civil Rights Project, Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services, Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, and the Federal Public Defender’s Office. They spent the week working on numerous issues including transgender rights, detention of unaccompanied immigrant minors, and the intersection of immigration and criminal justice. The trip also included a tour of the border with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and opportunities to observe both civil and criminal court proceedings.

—Allie Moore, 2L

(l-r) Tay Minshall, 2L, Aurora Randolph, 1L, Ali Sheets, 1L, Elie Zwiebel, 2L, Sujata Ramaiah, 1L, Allie Moore, 2L, Haley DiRenzo, 1L, and a border patrol officer. (Photo courtesy of Allie Moore)
TRIBAL WILLS PROJECT

Eighteen students spent this year’s spring break with Professor Lucy Marsh working on the annual Tribal Wills Project, now in its third year. Previously, students only travelled during spring break, but now the program includes trips in January, March and May. This year, students were stationed at Towaoc, Colorado and at White Mesa, Utah to work with the Ute Mountain Ute tribe. They also travelled to Ignacio, Colorado to support members of the Southern Ute tribe.

The group was swamped with clients, and unfortunately even had to turn away a number of people. Luckily, the students will return to work with additional tribal members in May, with the support of a grant from the Navajo DNA Legal Services. In fact, appointments have already been set up for their visit.

Supported by Prof. Marsh and other volunteer supervising attorneys, including recent Denver Law graduate Kate Puckett, JD’14, students wrote wills and medical powers of attorney as well as burial instructions and living wills. One of Prof. Marsh’s favorite clients was an elderly woman, dressed in beautiful traditional clothing, who wanted to write a will providing for her all of her children and grandchildren equally, instead of everything going to the oldest child, as the law would require if she had no will in place. This woman lived more than an hour away so the group was particularly happy to help her complete her will, even though it meant staying late after an already long day.

As long time participant Josh Nowak, 2L, shared, “The Tribal Wills Project is one of the best ways to get hands-on experience working with clients who really need it. But Tribal Wills isn’t just about experiential learning—it’s about seeing the bigger picture and figuring out how to fix relationships between communities. For many of us, Tribal Wills is an important reminder of why we came to law school in the first place. I look forward to the continuing adventures to come!”

Now that the project has done so many wills in the Southwest region over the last few years, the cultural barriers against doing such wills has begun to rapidly decrease. Countless individual clients are getting the support they need, and Denver Law students are helping to change the tide on this issue.

–Professor Lucy Marsh and Lecturer Alexi Freeman, director, Public Interest
Part-time/Evening Students: Fulfill your Public Service Requirement from your i-Phone!

If you are looking for a convenient way to either fulfill your 50 hour Public Service requirement and/or gain practical experience, consider participating in Virtual Pro Se Clinics (VPC), which are free monthly legal clinics at public libraries for parties who need legal assistance but don’t have or cannot afford to hire an attorney. These free clinics aim to provide one-on-one interaction with knowledgeable volunteer attorneys to help people understand the legal processes and procedures in a wide variety of civil legal actions. This is not pro bono representation, and the volunteer attorney’s discussion with VPC patrons about process and procedure does not constitute legal representation or legal advice.

All clinics are done online; students and lawyers can participate anywhere they have internet access and a webcam-equipped device (smartphone, laptop, tablet, etc.). Issues encountered will include civil issues, such as landlord tenant law, probate law, family law, veterans’ benefits, protection orders and more.

Student participation will be in three phases:
1) Watch at least one clinic and get familiar with the procedures, processes, etc. in Colorado civil legal cases;
2) Second chair (at discretion of supervisor attorney) a clinic to assist participants and;
3) First chair (at discretion of supervisor attorney) a clinic to assist participants.

Clinics run on different dates/times throughout the year and many are held in late afternoon and early evening. While this may not be a perfect timeframe for those of you who work during the day, there may be options to piecemeal together a few different clinics that could work for your schedule.

Email afreeman@law.du.edu with any questions. Or, to apply directly, email your resume to Ric Morgan, at morgan@hayday.org. Please note: You will have to complete all required paperwork for a public interest practicum in order for your work on this project to count towards your Public Service Requirement. Refer to the handy checklist of steps above.

For more information on the VPC, please visit www.cobar.org/tcl/tcl_articles.cfm?articleid=8527.

If this opportunity is not a good fit for you, contact afreeman@law.du.edu to discuss other ways to satisfy your requirement, as there is a list of placements that may be more suitable for evening students.