CLINICAL PROGRAMS

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Civil Litigation Clinic
Civil Rights Clinic
Community Economic Development Clinic
Criminal Defense Clinic
Environmental Law Clinic
Immigration Law and Policy Clinic

The Experience is the Advantage at Denver Law
Since 1904, the University of Denver Sturm College of Law’s Clinical Programs have given students the opportunity to learn about lawyering skills in the real world of clients who face a variety of issues for which they might not otherwise have legal representation. At the same time, our clinics provide students the opportunity to learn and practice these skills under the supervision of clinic faculty who work to ensure that all students obtain valuable educational experiences. Working in the clinic is one of the most exhilarating and gratifying experiences of our students’ law school careers.

While considered unusual in 1904, clinical legal education is now a critical part of all law schools’ curricula. Today, the University of Denver’s Clinical Programs has six in-house clinics, including criminal defense, civil litigation, civil rights, community economic development, environmental law and immigration law and policy. This range of clinical offerings provides students opportunities to learn many different skills including pretrial, trial and transactional. Students have the opportunity to interview and counsel clients, develop case theory, investigate and engage in discovery, negotiate with adversaries, mediate settlements and engage in the trial of disputed matters and draft contracts and bylaws and article of incorporation among others. They learn legal ethics and practice in a range of areas including issues of confidentiality and conflict of interest. DU’s Clinical Programs emphasize case management skills, enabling students to handle their cases effectively and efficiently as well as develop sensitivity to and empathy for the plight of underserved clients.

The 2019-2020 U.S. News & World Report law school rankings have placed Denver Law’s Clinical Programs at 7th best program in the country. This is the ninth consecutive year in which our clinical programs were ranked among the nation’s top 20.
Students participating in the Civil Litigation Clinic (CLC) help low-income clients work through civil controversies in three areas: housing (eviction defense and termination of subsidies), domestic violence (civil protection orders) and employment (discrimination and wage and hour litigation). In addition to integrating legal theory and practice, students in the CLC may be required to work on a community project during their time in the clinic.

The model of the Civil Litigation Clinic is based on student self-direction and community outreach. Because of this focus, students have a great deal of input into and ability to shape their clinical experience. With this focus, students are able to obtain a variety of learning experiences and target their expressed areas of interest.

Community Projects

In order to meet the community outreach goal of the CLC, students and faculty created community projects. The projects have varied through the years as the needs of our client community has changed and the interest of students shifted. Below is a description of the Civil Litigation Clinic projects.

- Warranty of Habitability Legislation
- Preservation of Affordable Housing Project
- Civil Access Pilot Project

Visit the Civil Litigation Clinic ONLINE to learn more.
The Civil Rights Clinic (CRC) is an intensive, year-long litigation program in which students represent clients in civil rights cases in federal court under the supervision of clinic faculty. Students also participate in a seminar designed to help them develop their litigation skills and understanding of the law, as well as the political and social contexts of civil rights litigation. In both the casework and seminar components of the CRC, we emphasize the development of analytical and writing skills, an appreciation of the importance of fact development and case theory, the need to be consistently self-conscious and self-critical about strategic decisions made throughout the course of litigation, and a sense of responsibility about the capacity of the law and legal institutions to do justice. Our goal is to graduate compassionate and rigorous attorneys who are committed to resolving legal problems effectively and responsibly.

CRC students handle their cases under the supervision of Professor Laura Rovner, Visiting Assistant Professor Nicole Godfrey and Clinical Fellow Danielle Jefferis. Currently, the focus of the CRC docket is on the constitutionality of the conditions in which federal and state prisoners are held, including issues such as access to adequate medical care, freedom of expression, and the free exercise of religion, although any kind of civil rights or civil liberties matter may be on our docket.

Our students are responsible for their clients and cases and handle all aspects of the litigation. The cases are relatively complex and students work on them in teams. The students working on each case meet at least once each week for a formal supervision conference with clinic faculty, and typically meet more frequently, depending on case needs. While a particular case may not present the opportunity to engage in all of the following tasks, each student will handle many of them: interviewing and counseling clients, development of case theory, drafting pleadings, conducting discovery (including taking and defending depositions), working with expert witnesses, negotiating settlements, appearances at pretrial conferences and motions hearings and conducting trials.

Visit the Civil Rights Clinic ONLINE to learn more.
The Community Economic Development Clinic teaches students transactional practice skills through the representation of nonprofit corporations, community-based associations and enterprises, small businesses and artists. The clinic provides both challenging client work and a rigorous classroom component to expose students to substantive legal concepts related to community economic development and business law. Client work may include drafting corporate formation documents; assisting nonprofit organizations with tax-exempt applications and maintenance of tax-exempt status; drafting and negotiating contracts; acting as general counsel to nonprofit corporations and small businesses; working with state and local government agencies; counseling related to intellectual property issues; and assisting with community-oriented real estate transactions and other transactions related to economic development and redevelopment projects.

Students also research issues related to public policies that affect clinic clients and provide community education workshops on substantive law issues pertinent to the clinic’s practice areas. Students learn practice skills emphasizing client counseling, drafting, research and planning, project management, advocacy and understanding group dynamics. Through both client work and the seminar component, students are exposed to a variety of social systems that impact their clients and are encouraged to think reflectively about the nature of transactional advocacy in the public’s interest. Students direct all aspects of the representation and work under the supervision of Associate Professor Patience Crowder.

Visit the Community Economic Development Clinic ONLINE to learn more.
Students enrolled in the Criminal Defense Clinic (CDC) represent low-income clients charged with misdemeanors and municipal ordinance violations including assault, disturbing the peace and shoplifting. Students appear in court at arraignments, pretrial conferences, motions hearings, trials and sentencing hearings. Students learn and apply lawyering skills such as interviewing and counseling, fact investigation, legal research and writing, oral advocacy and negotiation as well as courtroom skills. Extensive preparation and close supervision means these skills will be developed and applied in a framework of professional ethics and values.

The CDC offers students the opportunity to integrate professional ethics and values, legal theory and practice by representing indigent clients charged with crimes. Students will learn the lawyering skills necessary to defend a criminal case, including client interviewing, client counseling, negotiation, development of a case theory and discovery plan, issue spotting, researching and drafting various motions, fact investigation and trial skills.

The laboratory for learning will be the classroom, supervision sessions with faculty and Colorado’s jails and courtrooms. Students will learn how to work with clients who face a variety of legal, social and economic problems and will also learn the resources that are (or are not) available. Because rules of criminal procedure are closely linked to constitutional rights, many students will be presented with the opportunity to litigate constitutional issues and questions of the remedies available for constitutional violations.

The CDC offers students more than just exposure to a branch of law in preparation for a legal career—it is an opportunity to be a lawyer and work within a law firm under the guidance of experienced attorneys.

Visit the Criminal Defense Clinic ONLINE to learn more.
Under the supervision of Associate Professor Kevin Lynch, Assistant Professor Wyatt Sassman and Clinical Fellow Sarah Matsumoto, student attorneys in Denver Law’s Environmental Law Clinic (ELC) have the opportunity to provide representation to national, regional, local and tribal environmental advocacy organizations.

Since its inception in the 1980s, the ELC has worked to protect impacted communities, wild places and wildlife from pollution, exploitation and overdevelopment. The clinic’s mission is to serve the public interest while assisting students in honing legal skills as they explore the practice of environmental law.

The ELC accepts a wide variety of cases that best provide students with the opportunity to be directly involved in all aspects of client representation. It is through this hands-on approach to representation of clients, combined with individualized supervision and instruction, that ELC students are trained to be the next generation of environmental lawyers and advocates. In addition to developing the strong advocacy skills necessary to succeed as a lawyer, clinic students learn to identify and pursue policy issues that will shape the future of environmental protection.

The ELC focuses on legal advocacy and litigation as a means to: serve communities adversely and/or disproportionately impacted by overdevelopment and pollution; protect wild lands, special places and treasured landscapes; defend iconic wildlife and imperiled species; address the impacts of climate altering energy development; promote environmental justice; and protect our nation’s cultural and archeological heritage.

The ELC deals with a broad range of environmental laws addressing public lands, endangered species and wildlife, water, natural resources, pollution prevention and environmental justice. ELC students utilize a variety of federal environmental statutes to promote the goals of their clients including, but not limited to, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Administrative Procedure Act.

Visit the Environmental Law Clinic ONLINE to learn more.
The Immigration Law and Policy Clinic (ILPC) provides legal services at the intersection of criminal and immigration law. ILPC students participate in immigration removal cases, where vastly differing success rates correlate directly to representation. With their understanding of the relationship between immigration and criminal proceedings, ILPC students will assist in criminal cases with potential immigration consequences. Finally, they will serve organizational clients with legal services ancillary to legislative and policy advocacy. In their work, ILPC students will explore systemic problems in the immigration enforcement system such as racial and economic bias, law enforcement accountability, hyperincarceration and access to justice.

The ILPC offers students the opportunity to integrate professional ethics and values, legal theory and practice by representing indigent, detained clients facing removal. Students learn the lawyering skills necessary to defend a removal case, including client interviewing, client counseling, negotiation, development of a case theory, researching and drafting various motions, fact investigation and trial skills. The setting for learning will be the classroom, supervision sessions with faculty, the U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) Contract Detention Facility, run by the GEO Group in Aurora, and the immigration courts in the detention facility and in Denver. ILPC students learn how to work with clients who face a variety of legal, social and economic problems and learn what resources are or are not available. Many students will be presented with the opportunity to litigate constitutional issues and questions of the remedies available for constitutional violations. Students learn how immigration and criminal enforcement have become entwined, and may be called on to bring both criminal and immigration practice to bear on their clients’ legal problems. Cross-collaboration with the law school’s Criminal Defense Clinic will take place in the seminar component of the class and also, for many students, in the fieldwork component.

Visit the Immigration Law and Policy Clinic ONLINE to learn more.

Clinical Programs Video: Immigration Law and Policy Clinic

Featuring Professor Christopher Lasch and Ronald V. Yegge Clinical Co-Director and Associate Professor Robin Walker Sterling