

# A Heritage of Clinical Training

By Leslie Petrovski

In 1904, Dean L.W. Hoyt, University of Denver College of Law, established the country's first Legal Aid Dispensary in conjunction with the curriculum in a college of law. Designed to serve the legal needs of Denver's poor, as well as train students in the practice of law, the dispensary ignited a movement that continues to fuel debate among today's architects of legal education: How do you balance the teaching of theory with practice?

Led by veteran trial attorney Robert I. Gregg, DU's Legal Aid Dispensary handled an estimated 150 cases in its first year. An excerpt from DU's 1906 *Kynewishok* yearbook reported that the dispensary was "indeed an invaluable training school of legal experience, and several large law schools of the United States and Canada have written regarding it."

Not long thereafter, Colorado enacted the country's first student practice rule, authorizing students to appear in court, provided they had the approval of a supervising attorney and the presiding judge. Despite its groundbreaking status, DU's Legal Aid Dispensary suffered from the same hurdles that continue to make clinical teaching challenging: cost and logistics. After six years, DU abandoned its fledgling program.

Details are murky from the teens to the 1940s, but eventually the school assumed the clinical mantle once again. According to an article by Prof. Robert M. Hardaway

published in the *Denver Law Journal*, during this period "with some interruptions, the University of Denver clinic handled both civil and criminal cases under the direct supervision of adjunct and part-time professors. A mock-trial program was also initiated during this period, under which each student was required to prepare a civil or criminal case."

Spurred by the social climate of the times, in the late 1960s, College of Law Dean Bob Yegge, MA '58, JD '59, hired Dick Lamm, former Colorado state representative, to be the college's first formal clinical director. Noted for sponsoring the country's first successful state abortion bill, Lamm helped funnel student unrest into social action and hands-on lawyering. "There was a great deal of nihilism in the '60s," the former Colorado governor explains. "There was a lot of antagonism to government and idealism and rage. The clinical program was a sound academic program, but equally important, it gave students a place to let off steam."

In 1968, the Ford Foundation established the Council on Legal Education and Professional Responsibility. Over the next 10 years, this new council would distribute \$11 million to law schools interested in establishing legal clinics. According to Philip C. Schrag and Michael Meltsner in their 1998 book, *Reflections on Clinical Legal Education*, students in previous eras "learned little if anything about the practice of law, never entered a court room,



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never met a client, and learned virtually nothing about the problems they would encounter after graduation. The sole exception to this pattern was the University of Denver Law School, where for 60 years students had been representing indigent clients in divorce cases, evictions, and criminal trials...." An infusion of money, it was hoped, would goad many of the nation's law schools into experimenting with the "Denver model."

"Many schools, especially the elite schools, had very little interest in clinical education," explains Prof. Howard Rosenberg, who directed DU's clinical program from 1973 to 1979. "We were among a very few schools that had this priority."

Today, the College of Law continues to expand its legacy in clinical legal education. The current director of clinical programs, Assist. Prof. Jacqueline St. Joan, would like to see the program explore new clinical models and accommodate every DU student interested in incorporating a clinic into their schooling. "We want to provide resources for students to have high quality clinical experiences," she says, "and pursue the tradition of service for the poor for which this school is known."