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Faculty Spotlight

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
LAW SCHOOL

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LAW QUADRANGLE NOTES



Class-Based
Affirmative Action —
A Case of Look
(Carefully)
Before You Leap

Goodbye GATT,
Hello WTO

Class Action
Rule Change:
A Midpoint Report

Physician-Assisted
Suicide: A Bad Idea

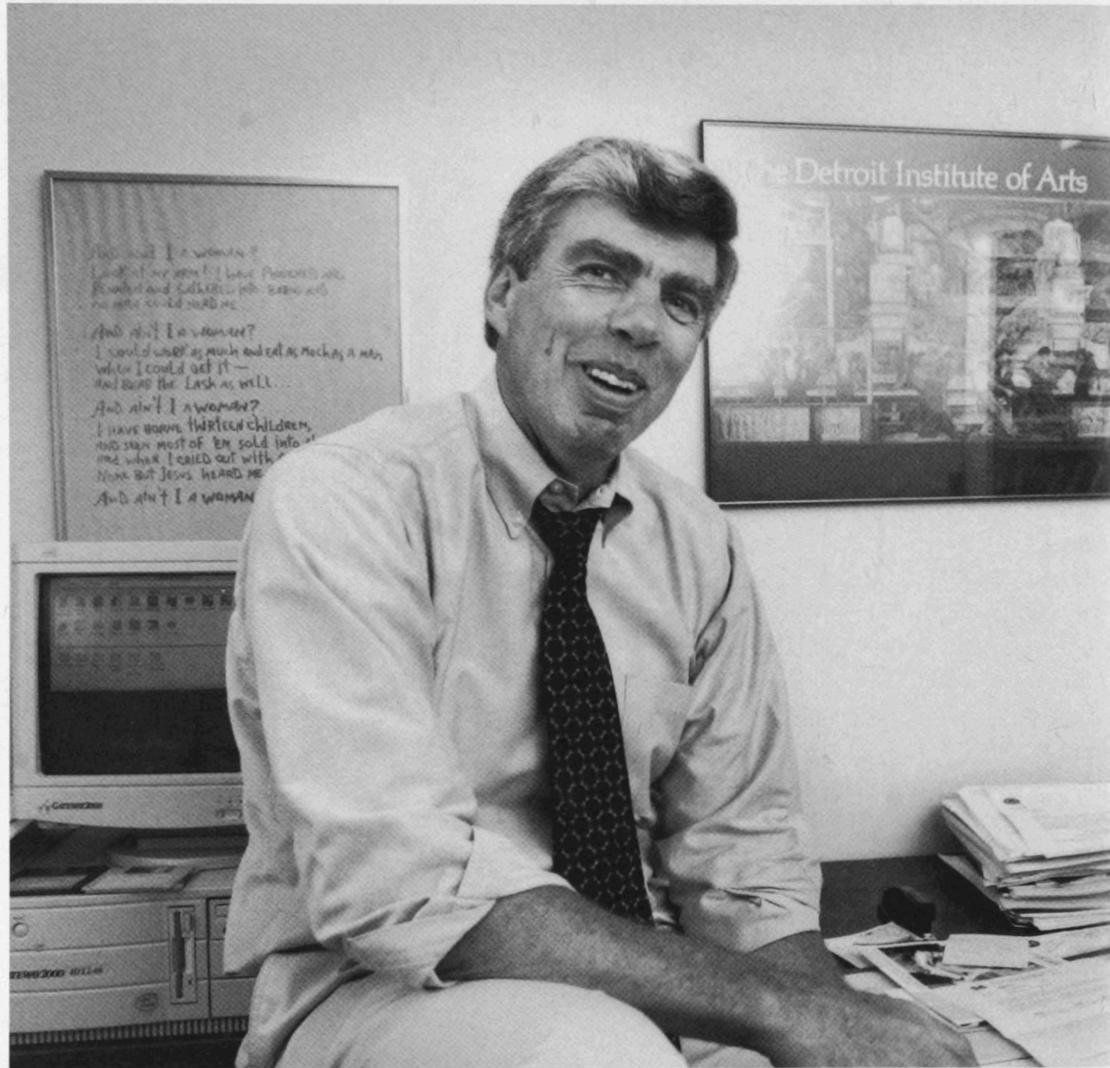
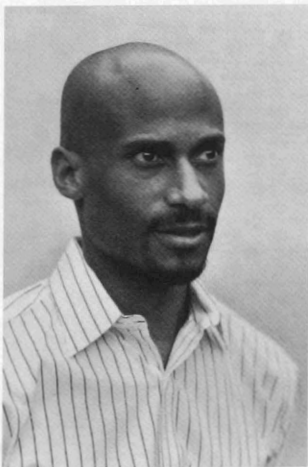
Nicholas J. Rine

Clinical Assistant Professor of Law

With each year that I'm here pretending to be a clinical teacher, two separate things become more and more striking. The first is that nobody has yet found out that I don't know what the hell I'm doing as a teacher. (Or, at least, nobody has squealed yet to whoever it is — if anyone — that runs this place). The second is that the most important things that the students get out of any law school course — clinical or otherwise — are those things that are self-taught.

Freeman Farrow, Third-Year Law Student

"Nick is very honest, straightforward and easy to talk with. He helps you see more realistically that often what you want to do and what the law allows are not the same. He's demanding but not unreasonably so because he's such a keen assessor of students' abilities. And he's accessible day or night, comes to student events because he's interested, and particularly contributes to and supports efforts to make this Law School a good place to be no matter what your background."



**Nicholas J. Rine,
J.D., B.A. Wayne State
University**

A part of what we offer the students the opportunity to learn in a clinic is skills training. Hopefully that means training in the simpler things like anticipating evidentiary problems or differences in approach between direct and cross examination. But it also means addressing much more sophisticated communications issues. Good trial lawyers, for example, understand that the dynamic of questioning a witness actually consists of multiple simultaneous communications with different audiences: jury, judge, witness, appellate record, all at the same time. In one short term, our students don't learn all of the nuances of controlling that dynamic, but all of them get a start and some of them get a good ways down the road.

Beyond trial or negotiation or interviewing skills, though, the more important things we have to offer to students are opportunities to learn how to handle that volatile intersection between the classroom world of legal theory and the real world of human behavior. And the clinics are most valuable to the students when we've done that in an atmosphere of safety and support so that students leave telling themselves: "I know I can handle this."

The range of ethical and professional issues that we have to help the students address is always changing with the cases that make up our current docket. But the most important thing that students get to teach themselves is advocacy. No legal "issue" can possibly be understood in all its complexity unless it has attached to it the faces and voices of living, breathing, worrying (and sometimes crazy) people. Approaching those people's problems from an advocacy perspective may be the most difficult adjustment for students coming into the clinic. Partly that's because the classroom perspective is so different; partly it's because representing another person's interests is always a daunting experience. Clients, after all, are what define lawyers. That's so even when those clients are completely irresponsible liars for whom a lawyer has to work real hard in order to call up the least bit of personal sympathy. (And we always have a few of those around the clinic, as well as the other, more likable, kind.)

The best part of what I do is getting to work each term with a whole new set of professional colleagues as each new group of student-lawyers comes into the clinic. That's because each term I get to sit back and watch another group of smart, interesting people teach themselves to stop thinking like students and start acting like lawyers. The second best part of what I do is that (unlike the courtroom) I can say anything I think, even where it gives fits to the editors of *Law Quadrangle Notes* in trying to make this sound respectable.

(Ed. Note: Rine may make light of sounding respectable, but he certainly sounds good to Law School students. Last year they awarded him, along with Assistant Professor Steve Croley, their L. Hart Wright Award for teaching excellence.)



Paul D. Reingold,
J.D. Boston University,
B.A. Amherst College,
Director, Clinical Office and
Clinical Professor of Law

"Nick is a savvy, street-smart lawyer who manages to combine a dead-on sense of people with an equally keen sense of justice. His judgment and his directness make Nick a favorite sounding board for faculty and students alike, and he never says no when people need help."