

30



YEAP

COUNTY

The Clinical Law Program has been training generations of lawyers in the fine art of public service. Three decades of experience show that practice does make perfect.

BY AMANDA MILEWSKI

RS &  
NG ...

**T**he Clinical Law Program turned 30 this year. The program is not just about matching law students with prospective clients: It's about realizing that creation of an Empowerment Zone in Baltimore would lead to a multitude of economic, housing and community legal needs among the Zone's residents; it's about recognizing that the HIV-positive population's spiraling need for legal services was rising as fast as the incidence of AIDS; and, it's about continually testing the waters for new ways to provide access to justice for people and groups without it.

It's really about being ready to learn new tricks, if the legal landscape requires it, no matter how old you are.



UM Law Professor Michael Pinard is conducting a legal analysis—with the aid of students—on the obstacles to felons re-entering the community.

It has been called a laboratory. And a teaching law firm, similar to a medical school's teaching hospital. But no matter how it's regarded or described, to the students and faculty who have participated in the School of Law's Clinical Law Program, this is the place where theory and practice have intersected for more than three decades.

"Our Clinical Law and experiential learning programs reflect the School of Law's strong belief that effective legal training must combine rigorous classroom teaching with real-life lawyering experiences—learning by doing," explains Professor Brenda Bratton Blom, current director of the Clinical Law Program. "These front-line experiences help students apply the law to current controversies—usually involving clients in crisis or at risk."

The Clinical Law Program has humble, but virtuous, beginnings. It grew from a single seminar back in 1973: Professor Peter Smith's Juvenile Justice seminar, which included a student practice component that attracted eight students.

"Our commitment to provide both excellent training and services has remained the

tial programs, which connect theoretical study with legal services on behalf of the poor or those without access to justice or organizations that represent them. The School of Law is one of only two law schools in the country that requires its graduates to serve vulnerable populations. "Requiring all law school graduates to participate in an experiential program that serves those with little or no access to justice is one of the biggest changes in the Clinical Law Program's thirty years," explains Teresa LaMaster ('95), managing director of the program. Because of this requirement, most School of Law graduates have a steadfast commitment to public service. "We are changing Maryland lawyers," continues LaMaster, "and how they view professional responsibility."

### A menu of legal services

The Clinical Law Program is ranked by its peers as one of the country's top such programs across the country. "Through the program, approximately 25 faculty and 230 students provide more than 100,000 hours of free legal service annually," attests LaMaster.

"The program is uniquely positioned to play this role of laboratory, where theory and practice come together."

same" since then, notes Blom, "though we have developed a much richer understanding of how that might be accomplished through the years."

In today's Clinical Law Program, the training is accomplished through clinical offerings in criminal and civil law settings, an extensive number of law-related externships, and through a Cardin Program Legal Theory and Practice (LTP) course (named in honor of Congressman Benjamin Cardin ['67]).

To graduate from the School of Law, all day students are required to participate in one of the above-mentioned experien-

Some of that legal service is offered through the program's sixteen professor-led clinics, ranging from AIDS to Criminal Defense/Trial to Mediation to Tobacco Control. Students are eligible to participate in a clinic after completing their first year of law school, and represent clients singly or in pairs. Clinic students do a significant amount of writing, drafting letters, pleadings, agreements, and organizational documents, legal memoranda, and briefs.

Students from Professor Blom's Economic, Housing, and Community Development Clinic have operated in the Washington Village/Pigtown area of Baltimore for nine years. They have worked with the Washington Village/Pigtown Neighborhood Planning Council Title Holding Company to research property titles, settle liens on proper-



This spring's "Making an Impact" conference detailed the numerous practical experiences available to students like these, intent on learning the practical side of the law.

ties, and sort out property taxes that weren't paid, according to Anthony Savage, chairman of the board of the holding company.

"We had been trying to transfer delinquent properties from Washington Village, which is part of Baltimore's Empowerment Zone, to Village Center, to stabilize the community," he explains. "We were faced with numerous problems, which we had been trying to resolve for two years. The students did a fabulous job; we couldn't have paid anyone to do a better job than they did." "And," he adds, "kudos to Brenda Blom. The young people reflect her dedication and commitment."

Maryland Senator Brian E. Frosh had similar experiences with students from Professor Rena Steinzor's Environmental Law Clinic. During his chairmanship of the Environmental Subcommittee (1995-2003), Frosh asked that clinic students examine the status of efforts to address the three main environmental problems that confront the state—poor air quality, water pollution, and land use. After extensive research, the students crafted a report for the General Assembly detailing the results of the audit and recommending future action. "This particular project received positive reviews all around," reports Frosh. "It was viewed with great respect; stakeholders felt that it was accurate and fair."

"My first encounter with the Environmental Law Clinic was during my first year in the Senate," Frosh recalls. "I introduced a bill to expand the 'law of standing' in an environmental context, a very complex area of the law. The clinic students dug up every case, and provided me with statistics and decisions from other states. I have a terrific relationship with the clinic—Rena Steinzor knocks herself out and the students do as well."

The Clinical Law Program's many law-related externships are complemented by

workshops, tutorials, or seminars that emphasize the relationship between theory and practice. Students can choose from externships in five different areas—Free-Standing, Business and Community Development, Intellectual Property Law, Environmental Law, and Law and Health Care. Past placements have included those at the Federal Trade Commission, Maryland Public Television, National Wildlife Federation, U.S. Department of Justice, and National Institutes of Health, to name a few.

### An impact on policy and practice

In addition to the hundreds of thousands of hours of service students donate through the Clinical Law Program, students, in turn, develop the skills to critically analyze the law in practice, particularly as it functions along the limitations of poverty, class, race, and political and economic power.

The Clinical Law Program also has furthered the development of new instructional models and new models of providing access to legal services for the poor. "For example, students in the Pro Se Clinic were instru-



The celebration surrounding the conference brought together UM Law professors who keep the Clinical Law Program strong: Brenda Bratton Blom (right) is the current director, Ellen Weber runs the Drug Policy Clinic, Professor C. Christopher Brown formed a litigation law firm that works with the School of Law.



Bryan A. Stevenson, Professor of Law, New York University, presented the keynote address on lawyering for the disadvantaged.

mental in setting up a *pro se* project for people getting divorced in Maryland,” explains Blom. “For a year, attorney-supervised students, in conjunction with the courts, developed forms that a non-lawyer could use in filing for a divorce. The students were then positioned in the courthouse, where they were available to give assistance to people. While we no longer run this clinic, those forms and that process now exists in every courthouse in Maryland, having been adopted by the courts.”

The Clinical Law Program fosters significant scholarship by its faculty, addressing inequalities in access to justice. Several notable projects have been conducted under the auspices of the program over the last year. Professor Ellen Weber, with students in her Drug Policy Clinic, completed a significant empirical research project on the legal needs of impoverished people with drug and alcohol addiction. The project resulted in important scholarship on both its results and its methods. Weber currently is writing an article based on the findings.

Professor Michael Pinard, director of the Ex-Offender Re-Entry Clinic, is conducting a complex legal analysis on the collateral consequences of felony convictions, particularly the civil law consequences that create barriers to re-entry into the community.

AIDS Clinic Director Deborah Weimer has begun a noteworthy interdisciplinary

study, in collaboration with the social work, medical, and nursing schools on the University of Maryland Baltimore campus, of the models of service of health, social welfare, and legal services to intergenerational families with adolescents living with AIDS.

In addition to the overarching access-to-justice issue, the Clinical Law Program also addresses legal problems prevalent in today's society. “Our Economic, Housing and Community Development Clinic, for example, grew out of Baltimore's Empowerment Zone Initiative,” asserts Blom. “Certainly our AIDS clinic grew out of an incredible need for services for those who were HIV-positive. Our clinics are often a response to need, where they can offer unique educational opportunities and fill a niche in the legal services delivery network.”

According to LaMaster, it is that special niche that has made the School of Law's Clinical Law Program such a success for the last thirty years. “The program is uniquely positioned to play this role of laboratory,” LaMaster notes, “where theory and practice come together to create a win-win situation both for our students and for the vulnerable population they serve.” JD

---

*Amanda Milewski, a freelance writer/ editor, covers university issues from her home in Eldersburg, Md.*



Dean Karen Rothenberg (center) has amassed a strong team of professors in teaching and consulting roles at the Clinical Law Program: Director and Associate Professor of Law Brenda Bratton Blom (left) and managing director Teresa LaMaster (second from right) were joined at the conference by Robert Kuehn, Professor of Law and Director of Clinical Programs, University of Alabama School of Law; Jane Harris Aiken, William M. Van Cleve Professor of Law, Washington University in St. Louis School of Law; Abby Smith, Professor of Law and Associate Director, Criminal Justice Clinic, Georgetown University Law Center; and Stephen Wizner, William O. Douglas Clinical Professor of Law, Yale Law School.