Civil Litigation and Justice Program: Access to Justice Clinic
Tackling Systemic Barriers to Justice

The Access to Justice Clinic, which launched in fall 2019, represents clients of Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) and provides free legal representation to poverty law clients in civil litigation matters. Students actively analyze and address the intersections of the legal system with the multiple systemic barriers their clients face through litigation and system change projects.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION
This full-year, 12-credit clinic combines hands-on litigation experience with classroom instruction. The Clinic represents poverty law clients who encounter systemic barriers to accessing the justice system. Students’ work consistently exposes them to these barriers and challenges them to generate solutions. Students are supervised by a clinical professor, with whom they meet regularly throughout the year. Each semester, three credits are allocated to fieldwork and three credits to coursework.

Students represent poverty law clients in domestic violence restraining order and family law cases, unemployment compensation appeals, employment and housing discrimination claims, wage and hour disputes, Family and Medical Leave Act claims, and Social Security disability appeals. Their clients face multiple systemic barriers to accessing justice, including those based on race, gender, disability, class, culture, and language. Students grapple with client narratives and experiences that often differ from their own and learn how to advocate for and present these stories to legal fact-finders. Students prepare for and conduct in-depth civil discovery, depositions, hearings, and trials, appear in state agencies and district, superior, and federal courts, make summary judgment arguments, and participate in state and federal mediation and negotiations for settlement.

Coursework places students’ fieldwork and the access-to-justice challenges faced by their clients within a larger theoretical and societal context. Students examine their role as counsel for low-income clients and explore the systemic social justice issues raised in their cases. Discussions focus on proposed solutions to the barriers their clients face and situate students within current legal theories as tools for social justice. They also participate in a wide range of projects, each of which focuses on an access-to-justice issue identified by the student. These projects allow students to work on solving an issue that is meaningful to them and to engage with the larger legal community; where applicable, students may partner with local and national organizations.

We warmly welcome all applicants and remind students that Boston University policy prohibits discrimination against any individual on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, military service, pregnancy or pregnancy-related condition, or because of marital, parental, or veteran status, and acts in conformity with all applicable state and federal laws. This policy extends to all BU Law academic programs.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS
Students continue the Civil Litigation and Justice Program’s long-standing tradition of representing GBLS clients and assisting them with escaping domestic violence and homelessness, as well as with resolving dangerous housing conditions, wage theft, hostile work environments, predatory sexual harassment, and obtaining the social security benefits necessary to survive. Students expand on this tradition by creating litigation strategies and projects that tackle access to justice gaps.

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