Civil Litigation and Justice Program: Individual Rights Litigation Clinic

Fighting the Downward Spiral of Poverty

The Individual Rights Litigation Clinic grew out of the original Boston University Legal Aid Program, which was formed in 1969 in conjunction with Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS). As part of GBLS’ larger mission of preventing individuals and families from further spiraling downward into the cycle of poverty, the Clinic provides free, full legal representation to GBLS clients in civil litigation matters.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION
The Clinic is a full-year, 12-credit clinic that combines hands-on litigation experience with classroom instruction. Students are assigned to work with a clinical professor and meet regularly with their supervisor throughout the year. Each semester, three credits are allocated to fieldwork and three credits to coursework. As part of their fieldwork, students represent clients in domestic violence restraining order and family law cases, eviction defense, unemployment compensation appeals, employment discrimination claims, wage and hour disputes, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) claims, and Social Security disability appeals. 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.

In the fall, students take a Pre-trial Advocacy/Professional Responsibility course, which satisfies BU Law’s professional responsibility requirement. In the spring, students enroll in a Trial Advocacy course. All coursework introduces students to the fundamentals of civil litigation using a combination of classroom discussions, written assignments, and simulations that are observed and critiqued by clinical faculty and outside attorneys.

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
All Clinic clients are low-income, with many facing 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 they learn how to advocate for and present these stories to legal fact-finders. They see firsthand the inequities in the legal system through their experiences. Students have assisted clients 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. Notable outcomes include:

- a Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination award of $175,000 in a sexual harassment case;
- a $100,000 settlement in a FMLA case;
- a $100,000 settlement in a state gender discrimination case; and
- a $55,000 settlement in a state case involving personal injury due to bad housing conditions.

bu.edu/law/clinics-apply