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## Students benefit from hands-on experience

*Law schools are investing more resourcing into expanding clinic offerings for their students.*

By Henry Meier

Daily Journal Staff Writer

As clinical education continues to expand, law schools in California are dedicating more resources to their programs.

Loyola Law School in Los Angeles just opened its new Alarcon Advocacy Center that serves as an on-campus hub for several new clinics, including the school's Project for the Innocent and Immigration Clinic.

Laurie Levenson, the school's chair of Ethical Advocacy, said the new emphasis on clinical programs represents the demands of both the students and the larger legal community.

"The whole program got started because a couple of students came to us and wanted to get more involved," Levenson said.

She said that once the initial interest was voiced, the school realized there was a demand from students for not only practical, hands-on education, but also a huge need in the community for pro bono legal work. The center seemed like a perfect marriage of the two.

Around the state, law schools are quickly adapting to serve their students and local populace in similar ways.

One of the strongest proponents for clinical education has been UC Irvine's School of Law. In its third year, the school is preparing to graduate its first class, all of whom will have taken a clinical course during their time at Irvine.

Carrie Hempel, the director of Irvine's clinical programs, likened the experiential learning process in law school to the rotations medical students go through before they graduate.

"Doctors do hands-on work with real patients in their third and fourth year and actually practice medicine," she said. "Clinical courses provide an opportunity for students to engage in the practice of law while under close supervision before they become lawyers."

So far, students at Irvine seem to enjoy the hands-on learning clinical education provides.

Jessica Glynn, a third-year law student at Irvine who participates in the school's Community and Economic Development Clinic, said the experience gives students a feel for the challenges they'll face once they step off campus.

"I think one of the amazing things about working on a real case is there isn't a right or wrong answer out there," she said. "You really have to research and problem solve. Students don't realize how much they rely on a textbook or a professor before they get

into a situation where those don't exist."

Mohammed Elayan, another third-year student in Irvine's Community and Economic Development Clinic, said the program was engaging him in a way that no class had.

"It's the first time I've been involved in law school in a meaningful way," he said. "I always felt like I was trying to fit a square peg in a round hole in regular classes. That was incredibly tough, not having anything that spoke to me."

Elayan said that being able to take ownership of a case and even bring in new clients reignited his passion for the law.

Serena Salinas, a third-year student at UC Davis School of Law, said her experience working with clients in three clinics, including the school's Immigration Rights Clinic and Civil Rights Clinic, gave her a sobering reminder that the court system can be fickle.

"You learn through the clinics that justice is not always blind," she said. "You learn that if the justice system is having a bad day, you're out of luck."

She said all the ups and downs the clinics provided helped prepare her to be an attorney and that the personal experience gave her insight classes haven't provided in the past.

"In classes, you're given the bare bones rules," Salinas said. "But the bare bones aren't enough. You really need to work with your clients in order to understand the nuances of a case fully."

Amagda Perez, the head of UC Davis' immigration clinic, said students like Salinas are not only helping themselves but also providing solid legal representation for the clients they represent with a supervising attorney.

"The students take this very, very seriously, and they do an amazing job," she said. "We get comments from the courts that these students are amazingly well-prepared. We even get compliments from prosecutors."

Shane Witnov, a first-year associate at Winston & Strawn LLP, said his time at UC Berkeley Law School's Samuelson Law, Technology and Public Policy Clinic trained him to become well-versed in a specific legal topic, a process that has helped him be a full-fledged attorney.

"In the clinical setting, you're forced to become an expert in a very narrow aspect of the law, which is valuable," he said. "It's something that you have to continue to do as an associate but with a variety of topics."

He said the interaction with attorneys and professors in the clinical program helped shape that expertise in a way that traditional classes didn't.

"The feedback loop in classes is pretty poor," he said. "You absorb a ton of information over the course of a semester, take a test on it, and then you often don't get the results back for a couple of months."

"The experience is totally different in the clinic. You're getting feedback from partners who are supervising and from the directors of the clinic on a regular basis."

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