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CLINIC HITS THIRTY

In This Training Ground, Students Find Experience is the Best Teacher

By Larry Teitelbaum

No one remembers exactly when, or how, it happened. But one day in the late 1970s a small group of devoted students let their fears coalesce into action. They staged a Sixties-style protest on campus, hoisting placards with an emphatic message: Don't close the Clinic!

Never mind that the rumors were more speculation than fact. Mere rumblings about the administration's intention to cut costs by targeting the Clinic were enough to arouse students' ire. Easy to say now, but looking back, they needn't have worried. The Clinic, which is observing its 30th anniversary this year, has become an indelible feature of the curriculum.

Today, the Gittis Center for Clinical Legal Studies, so named in 1996, is moored to the Law School. It is a laboratory of constant innovation and a valuable, as well as popular, training ground for would-be lawyers who want to learn how to practice law by working with clients.

"Offering this method of study, which relies on experience rather than textbook study, is really transformative for many students," says Douglas Frenkel L'72, director of clinical programs. "All of our students develop basic competencies. And every year, in every one of our courses, we get one or two or three students who get especially turned on by the combination of the course and the close one-on-one work. The program increasingly shapes what they do in their careers."

That certainly held true for Erica Schair L'03, an attorney with the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Clinic. "It was the best thing I did at Penn," says Schair, who represents children in foster care. She found her calling in the Child Advocacy Clinic. "I was able to practice being a lawyer. In law school, unlike medical school or veterinary school, you're not required to have that internship experience ... But the clinic offers that to you."

These days, there are hundreds of alumni who have similarly profited. This year, up to 160 students enrolled in the program, or at least five times more than 30 years ago. The clinical faculty has increased, too, with six professors and supervisors. Most important, the Law School runs an ever-expanding number of clinics in addition to Child

A Penn Law student mediates an employment case with guidance from Douglas Frenkel L'72, director of clinical programs.

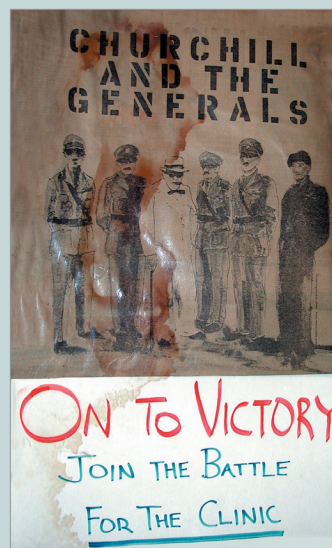
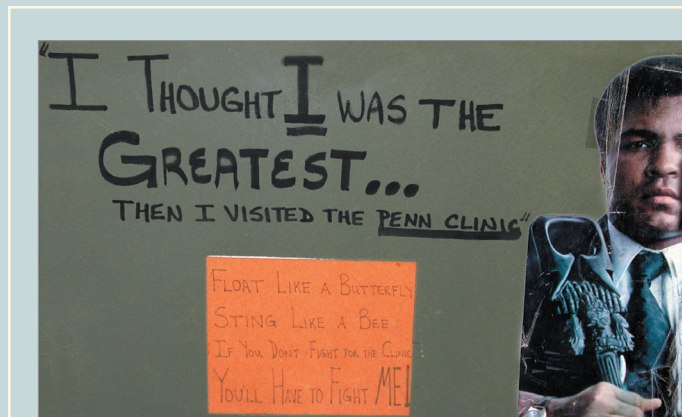


Advocacy: Civil Practice (which Schair took as well), Mediation, Legislative, Entrepreneurship Legal, and Criminal Defense, with one more starting in the fall, Transnational, which will focus on cross-cultural and international issues. Supplementing the curriculum is Lawyering in the Public Interest, a classroom course in which students reflect on challenges of representing low-income and disadvantaged clients.

In the early 1970s, students were drawn to activism. Out of this civic engagement grew an experiment: students were sent to prisons to represent convicts in civil rights cases. Back then, students used Community Legal Services' offices for their research. It was, by today's standards, very ad hoc. The official start-up of the in-house clinic came in the 1976–77 academic year, when the program went by the name of the Penn Legal Assistance Office.

Since then, Penn Law's program has dovetailed with the national movement to make the law school curriculum more relevant to the practice of law. "As you look back over the last quarter century to 30 years, this has probably been the most sustained curricular change we've had," says Frenkel, who has been leading the clinic since 1980, following the first director, Mark Spiegel. "The first year is largely identical to what it was when I was in law school more than 30 years ago. The ability to study experientially, to have 60 percent of each class do that, has been a major difference."

Carrie Menkel Meadow L'74, now the A.B. Chettle Jr. Professor of Dispute Resolution and Civil Procedure at Georgetown University Law Center, was one of the first teachers in Penn Law's clinical program. In the formative years, she recounts, the program was rather small — only four supervisors and 30 students. The school had eight students to a supervisor — the lowest student-faculty ratio in the country, she adds. Students also had a small caseload — five cases each. "Those cases were quite diverse, and that's another thing that made Penn unusual," says Menkel-Meadow. "Students experienced a full range of cases: prisoner abuse cases, prisoner civil rights cases, age discrimination, unemployment compensation, family law, workers compensation — everything from complex federal litigation to



In the late 1970s, students used their creative energies to protest what they thought were threats to close the clinic. They expressed themselves with posters such as these.

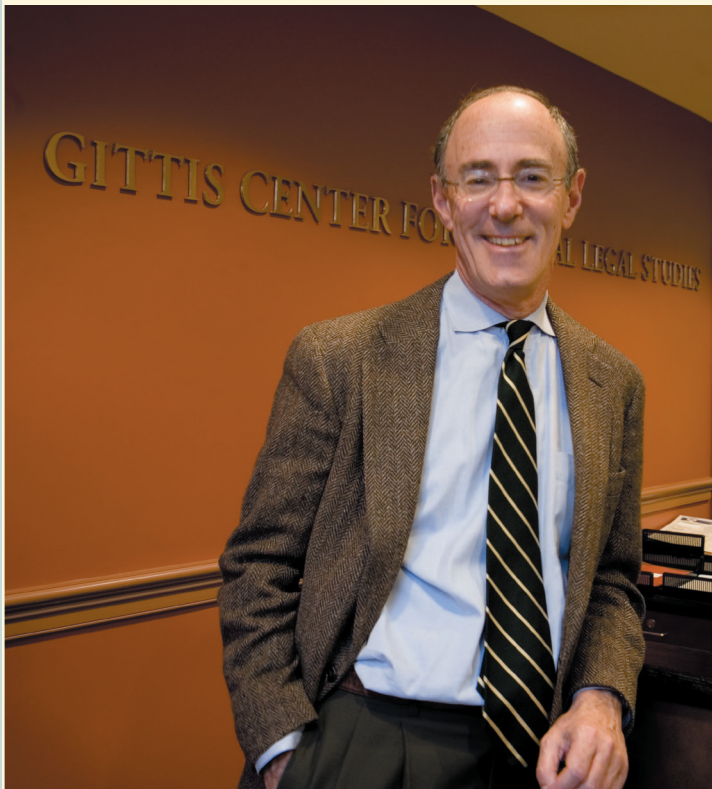
state court and administrative proceedings. In most other clinics, students specialized in one subject area."

Among the early students was Cathy Carr L'79. She entered the clinic in the fall of 1978. Carr, who was in her third year, knew all about statutes, standing and precedents, but precious little about practice. She discovered this early on, when she went to City Hall in Philadelphia to file a complaint. The clerk told her she needed a praecipe (an official notice) to make the filing. Precipice, that she knew. But a praecipe? As she stood there

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Douglas Frenkel L'72, director of clinical programs, has been running the program since 1980.



dumbfounded, thinking that this was not covered in clinic, the clerk reached into the trash and handed her a used piece of paper flipped to its blank side and told her what to write.

"I remember it (the clinic) as being an incredibly valuable experience," says Carr, who, like Schair, credits the clinic with

shaping her career. She is executive director of Community Legal Services in Philadelphia. "For the very first time clients shared their stories with me and looked to me to advise them. It was incredibly exciting and rewarding and also very scary."

It has been equally exciting for Raj Parekh, who calls the clinic "the gem of Penn Law." Parekh, who graduates this year, has spent the spring semester in the Legislative Clinic, working for the Senate Judiciary Committee. He writes memos to chief counsel and senators on the constitutionality of proposed legislation and amendments. Describing the work as intellectually satisfying, Parekh exclaims: "The clinic is, by far, the best experience that I've had at Penn Law."

But, despite its popularity with students, it has not always been an easy ride for the clinic. From the start, old-school academics worried that the clinic would drain resources from the scholarly program. Faculty suggested students work in downtown law firms or apprentice after law school to gain practical experience. As the debate percolated during the late 1970s, rumors circulated about efforts to close the clinic. When students got wind of it, they protested.

As clinic administrator Valerie Rose recalls, "Students really went on a campaign. (They) put up big posters all around the school, the billboards reading 'Save the Clinic.'" The apocalypse never came but the program became itinerant.

In 1977, the clinic relocated from the Law School basement to more spacious, but still basic, quarters in the old dorms. It was a good run, lasting 13 years — to 1990. When Dean Robert Mundheim decided to raze the dorms and build Tanenbaum Hall, the clinical program had to move again, this time to the International House, several blocks from the Law School. Finally,

CLINICAL PROGRAMS

The program is brought in-house to the first floor of the Law School dorms. A teaching law office called the Penn Legal Assistance Office is opened.

Doug Frenkel becomes Director of Clinical Programs.

Small Business Clinic, one of the first in the country, is founded in partnership with the Wharton School SBDC.

Juvenile Law Clinic is established in conjunction with Penn's School of Social Work.

The Mediation clinic is created as one of the first conflict resolution programs in the country.

1976-77

1980

1981

1983

1986

in 1996, the clinic found a permanent home in the ground floor of Silverman Hall, thanks to Howard Gittis W'55 L'58, who supported the program with an operating endowment.

"I am enormously proud to have my name associated with this program," says Gittis. "The job that Doug and the clinical faculty are doing is amazing. The expansion of the center has made it even more meaningful to students and I look forward to seeing it continue to grow and flourish."

As Gittis notes, the program has matured. The clinic started as a workshop for litigation, but has gradually expanded. Notably, in 1981 Penn Law created one of the country's first Small Business clinics, now known as the Entrepreneurship Legal Clinic — a name change which reflects a shift from advising primarily business and nonprofit start-ups to more complex transactional work.

"We were way ahead of the curve," notes Frenkel. "We got very well known for that innovation. And now, of course, it's become a staple in most law school clinical programs."

The next step in its evolution will be the Transnational Clinic, for which Frenkel has high hopes. Frenkel developed the concept for this clinic in response to an unmistakable trend: more and more students are literally graduating into firms that handle international transactions. At the same time, public interest lawyers today are, in many cases, representing immigrants, diverse cultural groups, and human rights abuse victims.

Says Frenkel: "I see this clinic as having an advocacy role. I see it as having a transactional component ... I see it as having potential legislative activities. Already, we have been contacted by courts seeking our involvement in asylum cases and by local

Howard Gittis W'55 L'58 cuts ribbon at opening, in 1996, of renamed Gittis Center for Clinical Legal Studies. Standing next to Gittis (left to right) are Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) and then-Penn Law Dean Colin S. Diver. On the other side of the ribbon is Howard's mother, Sophie.



legislators who want help in making Philadelphia more immigrant-friendly."

Such innovation has been the clinic's hallmark for 30 years, taking it from a program at the margins to one that more than half of each entering class cannot do without. Which leads Carrie Menkel-Meadow to say, "I think it's one of the highest quality programs in the country ... and Doug's leadership has just been terrific."

Clinical Programs move to International House as the Law dorms are demolished for the building of Tanenbaum Hall.

Clinical Programs return to state-of-the-art offices in the ground floor of Silverman Hall. The program is renamed the Gittis Center for Clinical Legal Studies to reflect its new endowment.

Legislative Clinic is established.

Interdisciplinary Child Advocacy Clinic links Penn's Medical School/ Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Penn's School of Social Policy and Practice with the Gittis Center.

Transnational Clinic slated to open fall 2006.

1990

1996

1997

2000

2006

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Thirty-Four Years and Counting for Valerie Rose, Heart of the Legal Clinic

By Larry Teitelbaum

Valerie Rose



She has watched the program grow from something akin to a one-room schoolhouse to a full-fledged law office. She remembers when third-year students supervised the cases. And she lived through a period when clinical training for law school students was viewed as a diversion from the serious study of theory.

For more than thirty years, Valerie Rose has managed the legal clinic through good times and bad, protecting her preserve like an eagle circling its young.

“She celebrates our successes and mourns our losses, professional and personal,” says Alan Lerner, a practice professor of law at the clinic. “While we kid her about the coffee mug inscribed ‘She Who Must Be Obeyed’, the reality is that Valerie is totally supportive, and of endless good cheer.”

Valerie is known as a taskmaster, cheerleader and peerless administrator who operates the Gittis Center for Clinical Legal Studies with surgical precision.

“Making the clinic run, not only on time but smartly, is what she does,” says Lerner. “Working with Valerie brings to mind the surgical theater. When the surgeon needs a particular piece of equipment she puts out her hand and immediately finds that item firmly in her grip. Similarly, Valerie anticipates the need, identifies the solution, and puts it in place.”

She has been providing all the tools the clinic needs since 1972, when it had no official standing and bore little resemblance to today’s program, which took root in 1976 as the Penn Legal Assistance Office.

Her long affiliation began after she had returned from a one-year sojourn around the world. Valerie, who had left her job as an assistant to Penn Law professors Paul Bender and Ralph Spritzer

to go on the self-enforced sabbatical, took a temporary position in the provost’s office. But one day she got a call from the professors, who asked her to run a new program for indigent prisoners.

In those days, before it evolved into what is recognized as today’s clinic, the program was a barebones affair. A solitary room in the balcony of the former Roberts Hall served as the office and workspace. There was but one clinic — litigation — and only eight to 10 students were enrolled. There was no classroom study. And, Valerie, the consummate juggler, often had to answer the phone herself to field calls from clients who needed representation.

In 1977, the program moved to the Law School dorms, where there was more space but hardly enough to qualify as luxurious. “Our offices were right on top of each other and they were very small,” says Valerie. “There was a closeness and a camaraderie ... We’ve gotten more formal.”

Today, the clinical program is an integral part of legal education at the Law School. No longer is the program devoted solely to protecting the rights of prisoners. Now, there are eight areas of concentration — from entrepreneurship to the transnational clinic, which, when it starts in fall 2006, will be dedicated to immigration issues — and 160 students a year who want to experience what it’s like to practice law before they graduate. At the center of it all is Valerie Rose, who, in addition to working closely with students and responding to their needs, handles personnel and payroll and manages the budget. In a word, she’s indispensable.

Although Valerie deflects credit, praising the “committed and caring support staff” for their efforts, it’s clear she holds a very special place in the clinic’s history.

“She treats the program as if it’s her child. Without her, I couldn’t function,” declares clinical director Douglas Frenkel.

Adds Practice Professor of Law Louis S. Rulli: “All you need to do is be around her for ten minutes to know how much she cares about this place.”

And after 34 years on the job, Valerie shows no signs of slowing down or walking away from the job that she loves. “I’ve been calling myself the ‘Eveready Bunny’ of the clinic,” she says. “I just keep going and going and going.” **PLU**