

Internship/Clinical Semester

The primary focus of the *clinical semester* is learning firsthand about the work of the **Massachusetts Fair Housing Center**, an advocacy agency in Holyoke that deals with housing discrimination and predatory lending, issues closely connected with many other forms of discrimination.

Allegations of discrimination are brought, with the help of MFHC attorneys and interns, to the state Housing Court, the Federal District Court, or the Mass. Commission Against Discrimination. The work provides students with a significant opportunity to gain professional skills in investigation, application of statutory law, alternative dispute resolution, and administrative and legislative policy. A common theme that runs through the clinical training and work is development of individual and collaborative work habits and respect for critical perspectives about the broader questions of law and social justice.

Comments from Project Grads

In spring, 2009, the Clinical Project will place its first interns at MFHC, after ten years of work at MCAD. The new placement offers a greater independence and focus on advocacy. Several past interns have gone on to make careers in the civil rights field, some after attending law school. We expect this to continue. Here are some comments from past interns about their experience:

“I felt like I was one of the staff from the beginning. I was doing the same work that the full-time investigators were doing. My clinical experience was an absolute pleasure.”

-Neldy Jean-Francois, Project grad

“The Clinical experience was obviously a positive one; to say that the clinic ‘influenced’ what I am doing today is an understatement. The amount of responsibility that was given to the interns was amazing... and taking the follow-up course allowed me to really reflect on what I learned and to critique the experience from a different vantage point.”

-Jessica Thrall, Project grad & C.R. Fellow

“The Fellowship is an amazing experience and takes the internship to the next level. It developed my organizational and leadership abilities. It has really altered the direction of my life and priorities and deepened my commitment to the work.”

- Erica Gagne, Project grad & C.R. Fellow

CIVIL RIGHTS CLINICAL PROJECT

SPRING 2009

Applications and a more detailed description of the Project are currently available in the Legal Studies Office or online at www.umass.edu/legal

Applications are due October 24, 2008

Interviews will be held October 27-31

Decisions will be made by November 3

Students with questions can call Professor Arons at 545-3536 or email him at arons@legal.umass.edu

Project Description

The Civil Rights Clinical Project began in 1997 as collaboration between the Department of Legal Studies and the the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), and has now moved to the Mass. Fair Housing Center (MFHC), a major advocacy organization with offices in Holyoke. The Project includes a full-semester's full-time clinical placement at MFHC and enrollment in three academic courses (one before, one during, and one after the clinical work). Since its founding, the Project has grown significantly in response to the changing landscape of civil rights enforcement nationally and in Massachusetts. With the move to MFHC, the Project will involve students in handling civil rights complaints not only at MCAD, but in assisting in cases for filing in state and federal courts. Study and research on current civil rights policy issues and in community outreach are also part of the work of interns and agency.

The Current Civil Rights Struggle

Civil rights protections have come under attack in recent years. The current predatory lending and housing crises, and their negative effect on many other forms of discrimination, have further degraded the lives of many people. These victims of injustice have also lost ground as an increasingly coded discourse distracts attention from the empirical evidence of racial segregation and other forms of discrimination in contemporary society. The Project provides students with an understanding of the legal and historical background of modern civil rights protections, and explores the nature and influence of contemporary public debate and threats to civil rights in the United States. The coursework of the Project aims to develop the critical thinking skills needed for an effective response to those attacks.

Project Requirements/Sequence

Participants in the Project follow a three-semester sequence. The Clinical portion of the project is offered during both fall and spring semesters. Legal Studies majors and others may apply.

First Semester: Students must have taken or currently be taking one of the following classes:

- LS 497C Who Owns Equality (offered in the Fall)
- LS 497F Social Justice Denied (offered in the Spring)
- LS 497E Lawyers, Advocacy & Civil Rights

Second Semester: Clinical Placement

- Students work 35 hrs/week for an entire semester at MFHC in Holyoke
- Students also take 491Z "Civil Rights Advocacy and Policy: Clinical Seminar", a weekly seminar included in the 35 hr week.

Third Semester: follow-up seminar either semester

- 491J Integrative Senior Seminar (usually offered both semesters)

Course descriptions for required classes available in Legal Studies Office, or at www.umass.edu/legal

Credits for Completion of Project

A total of 24 credits are awarded for students enrolled in the Project.

- Students receive three credits for the first semester class
- Students receive 18 credits for the Clinical portion of the project (9 graded, 9 pass/fail)
- Students receive three credits for the third, follow-up semester course.