Children and Family Advocacy Clinic

Children and Family Advocacy Clinic Experience

Under the direct supervision of Washington University Law faculty, student attorneys in the Children and Family Advocacy Clinic (CFAC) (formerly called the Civil Justice Clinic) represent children, teens, parents and other relatives in a variety of legal proceedings affecting individual and family liberty rights and interests. This clinic is also the site for social work student concentration placements.

The CFAC provides legal services to children, parents, and extended family in matters involving family regulation, recognition, and protection, including custody, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, paternity, visitation, guardianship, termination of parental rights, and the occasional appeal. Students may serve as guardians ad litem, attorneys for children, attorneys for parents or attorneys for other family members seeking assistance regarding family matters. Consistent with our commitment to holistic representation, the CFAC serves as a field site for social work students.

As lead counsel, student attorneys take responsibility for all aspects of a client’s case. The CFAC provides students with the opportunity to engage in direct client representation, learn effective lawyering skills both in and out of court, grapple with ethical issues as they arise in the practice, and develop the fundamental ability to learn from experience. In addition, they play an important role in seeking to improve the juvenile and family justice systems in the St. Louis metro area.

Students appear in both St. Louis City and County Family & Probate Courts, and occasionally St. Charles County.

Student Perspectives

“Working in the Civil Justice Clinic was by far the best experience of law school, hands down!”

“The Civil Justice Clinic was my favorite law school experience. Having full responsibility for my cases — from interviewing the client all the way through the trial and settlement phases — was an extraordinary experience that I will never forget. Even more rewarding was how genuinely appreciative our clients were of our work.”

“My clinical experiences were some of my best experiences in law school. When most of law school focuses on doctrinal cases often without a social justice component, it was exciting to have the opportunity to serve real clients. . . .”

“I gained a whole new set of skills, and my eyes were opened. I had heard about police misconduct and overreaching law enforcement involving young people, but [my] case made me realize that it really does exist. My client’s rights had been infringed upon, and I had the incredible opportunity to make a difference.”

“I learned in clinic how to practically apply the ‘legal thinking’ that law school attempts to teach....”

CFAC students and Presiding Judge Michael Burton at St. Louis County Juvenile Court
Typical Student Activities

- Serve as lead counsel for clients
- Serve as Guardian ad litem for children and also adults with disabilities
- Serve as primary contact with clients, court, opposing counsel and others involved in clinic matters
- Appear in court on motions, pre-trial matters, settlement conferences, trials, dispositions, protective custody hearings, and review hearings
- Interview and counsel clients
- Provide holistic representation
- Draft complaints, petitions, motions, GAL reports, memoranda of law, and discovery
- Negotiate with opposing counsel
- Advocate for with social services agencies to assist with clients social
- Advocate before administrative agencies
- Undertake educational advocacy for clients within the school system
- Protect children and family constitutional liberties
- Engage in systemic reform efforts
- Work in multi- or inter-disciplinary teams

For more information, contact:
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Basic Requirements

- Students must spend a minimum of 21 hours per week on clinic-related work for 6 credit hours or 28 hours for 8 credits.
- Students attend weekly seminar meetings (Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 to 5:00 pm) and weekly supervision meetings, along with ad hoc meetings regarding emerging issues facing clients and affecting their legal rights and objectives.
- Court appearances will most often be in the morning, so students should schedule other classes and commitments accordingly.

Preferred course Pre/Co-requisites

- Evidence, and a course from the ethics curriculum (or permission from the instructor).
- Rule 13 certification will be required in the Fall semester and preferred in the Spring semester when, in exceptional cases and with permission of the instructor, students ineligible for Rule 13 certification may be permitted.

The Bottom Line

- Enrollment is limited to 4 students.
- This is a 6-8 credit course.
- The course is graded on a modified pass/fail basis for the first 6 credits; additional credits are pass/fail only.
- The text for the course is selected Readings.
- There is no final exam.
- Students sitting for the February bar are not eligible.

Children and Family Advocacy Clinic Faculty: Annette Appell