The Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic Experience

The Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic (IEC) functions as a pro bono law practice handling environmental and community health cases.

IEC students engage in litigation and advocacy as part of an interdisciplinary team, which includes students from the schools of law, engineering, arts and sciences, social work, medicine, and occasionally business and architecture. Students develop their lawyering and consulting skills acting as the professionals in their cases and through extensive interaction with experienced IEC faculty.

The IEC’s cases tackle some of the most challenging and important water, air, waste, and environmental justice problems in the region and nation. In addition, students will learn about working in the environmental public interest, as most of the clients are non-profit organizations and under-represented communities. The IEC works in Missouri and Illinois, and on some cases of national scope.

Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic Aims

As much as possible, students are responsible for making key decisions and performing much of the “heavy lifting” in pursuit of clients’ goals. Students experience the challenges and rewards of lawyering and consulting by stepping into the role as professionals in a supportive setting, with ongoing faculty feedback and assistance.

Typical Activities

- Court and administrative litigation and advocacy
- Legislation and regulation drafting
- Strategic planning
- Significant contact with clients, government agencies, and opposing attorneys
- Drafting briefs and memoranda
- Reviewing permits and drafting comment letters
- Participating in hearings, meetings, and site visits
- Requesting and reviewing public records in government offices

Student Perspectives

- “Wonderful hands-on experience even if you aren’t going into environmental law. It was a truly useful learning opportunity to take with me into my professional career.”
- “I will always remember the experience I had arguing before the court at the Motion to Dismiss hearing.”
- “It’s a lot of work but it’s worth it. I learned a ton!”
- “The clinic was a very valuable learning experience for me. The hands-on nature of the clinic and the opportunity the clinic provides for students to take a front-seat role in real cases is invaluable.”
- “I would not be exaggerating when I say that my clinic experience was one of the best learning experiences of my life.”
- “The immense amount of knowledge I have gained will be invaluable to me in my career, and more generally, my everyday life.”

Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic students meet with clients in Franklin County, Missouri.
After three years of negotiation, the IEC’s client and the USEPA reached a settlement agreement with the Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD), St. Louis’s sewer authority, that requires MSD to spend more than $4 billion over the next 23 years building infrastructure and upgrading the region’s sewer systems to comply with the Clean Water Act. At the client’s urging, MSD is undertaking specific green infrastructure projects in North St. Louis. The settlement was the largest ever in Missouri and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch called it “the largest public works project in St. Louis’ history.”

Achieved groundbreaking global warming settlement involving the proposed construction of a coal-fired power plant in Kansas City. Challenged the construction of another proposed new coal-fired power plant in central Missouri; company abandoned plans for the plant in favor of renewable energy sources.

Prompted by our federal court suit, USEPA concluded its four-year review of the outdated Nation Ambient Air Quality Standard for lead. The review resulted in a 90% reduction in the lead emission standard.

Negotiated a major settlement agreement involving proposed expansion of a massive steel mill in Granite City, IL. The proposed projects went forward, but subject to significant additional pollution control measures and a $5 million commitment by the companies to undertake fine particulate and greenhouse gas emissions reduction projects in the vicinity of the facility.

For more information, contact:
Maxine Lipeles
Email: milipele@wulaw.wustl.edu
Phone: 314-935-5837
Website: http://law.wustl.edu/intenv

Law students are required to devote an average of 21 hours per week to IEC work if enrolling for six credit hours (28 hours per week are required if enrolling for eight credit hours). Non-law students are required to devote an average of 12 hours per week to IEC work if enrolling for three credit hours (three additional hours per week are required for each additional credit hour).

This includes preparation for and attendance each week in:
- a 2-hour seminar for all students in the course on Friday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- one team meeting with other students and faculty working on your case(s)
- one individual meeting with your supervising professor

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this Clinic. Administrative Law or a course related to environmental law is recommended for law students but not required as a pre- or co-requisite. Coursework and/or experience in environmental engineering, environmental science, or related fields is recommended for non-law students.

The Bottom Line

- Enrollment is limited to 10 law students and 8 non-law students
- 6-8 credit course (law); 3-6 credit course (non-law)
- Law students are graded on a modified pass/fail basis
- Substantial reading and writing on client work. Limited additional reading and writing for seminar
- No exams