

WCL's Disability Law Clinic and the Disability Law Society

Disability, Access, and Teaching: A One-Day Symposium

American University

April 10, 2019

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L. Thomas Mangrum, Self-Advocate

History of the Disability Rights Law Clinic (DRLC)

- Currently in its 14th year
- Started in AY 2005-06 with one professor (RDD) and 8 students (all women)
- Added visitor/practitioner-in-residence, AY 2008-09; increased to two faculty, 12 students. Number of students has varied from 12-16.
- From the beginning to the present, 160 students—75% women, 25% men
- Approximately 25 students have gone into disability rights or related areas (children's rights/veteran's rights/rights of older persons), not including some governmental positions.

Structure of the clinic

- Two semesters—7 graded credits per semester
- Case work/supervision
- Weekly seminar
- Case rounds

Kinds of cases

- Special Education
- Alternatives to Guardianship (supported decision making)
- Advance Directives/GAL
- Medicaid waiver
- Commitment of people with intellectual disabilities
- Employment discrimination (ADA Title 1/Section 504)
- Access to public accommodations (ADA Title III)
- Project/non-case-oriented work

Rationale for Cases We Take

- Learning value for students, who function as “first chair” on the case
- Need in the community
- Emphasis on client autonomy and dignity and less of an emphasis on benefits
- Social vs. medical model
- Still unusual kind of clinic: Of 187 law schools that responded to a 2017 survey, 12% indicated they had a disability clinic—many of these are benefits-oriented (SSI, SSDI)

Simulations and Role of Self-Advocate Actors

- Two year-long simulations that give students the opportunity to practice interviewing, counseling, and trial skills
- One is in the special education area and the other involves a person with intellectual disability over whom a family member seeks guardianship
- Many clinics use actors or other students to play client roles; we use real people.
- In the simulation with a person with I/DD, important to have people who live with I/DD to bring realism to the role and enhance the learning value.

Project Action!

- Active Self-Advocacy Group in DC
- Became familiar with the organization through my work as long-time chair of the Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities
- Over time we have probably had 5-6 self-advocates from Project Action! work with us in this collaborative way.
- Thomas Mangrum has worked with us for the longest time.

Conclusion

THANK YOU!

