

School celebrates 50+ years of clinical legal education

HISTORY

Approximately five decades ago, the Legal Aid Clinic was established under a grant with the county to address the needs of low-income Athenians in civil and criminal cases. During the clinic's first full year of operation in 1968, law students – working alongside law school faculty under the recently enacted Law School Legal Aid Agency Act – handled more than 375 cases.

Two years later, in 1970, when the state of Georgia began allowing third-year law students to assist in the prosecution of cases, what is now the Prosecutorial Justice Program was established with a course component enabling students to earn academic credit for their work.

The late Milner S. Ball (J.D.'71) – who retired from the law school as the Caldwell Chair in Constitutional Law during 2007 – is considered by many to be the law school's father of public interest law. Ball created the Environmental Practicum and the Public Interest Practicum and started the Civil Externship. In these efforts, he modeled a spirit of quality service to those in need that is a defining quality of our law clinics to this day.

In 1996, Associate Professor Alexander W. “Alex” Scherr joined the law school's faculty as its first director of civil clinics. Under his leadership, offerings expanded exponentially. Currently the School of Law boasts 17 clinical and experiential learning opportunities including criminal and civil litigation practice, transactional and in-house work, and judicial and governmental placements, where students gain valuable experience, skills and insight.

Over the past 50+ years, thousands of School of Law students have learned the law through participation in a clinic. In fact, nearly 90% of the Class of 2018 participated in at least one clinic or externship course during their academic career, with almost 50% taking two or more classes.

Adapted from Associate Dean Eleanor “Ellie” Crosby Lanier’s introduction to a special online issue of the Georgia Law Review dedicated to Law Clinics @ 50.

THE CELEBRATION

Roughly one dozen events were held throughout the 2018–19 academic year to mark this momentous milestone, culminating with a reception and tours during the law school's Annual Alumni/Alumnae Weekend in March. The festivities allowed former and current students and faculty and other members of the law school community to gather and share their favorite memories and experiences. An interactive timeline of clinical highlights – including facts about former offerings such as the Prisoner Legal Counseling Project and the Land Use Clinic – provided a good opportunity to reminisce and fact-check recollections.

GEORGIA LAW REVIEW SPECIAL ISSUE

The *Georgia Law Review* partnered with the school's clinical and experiential learning faculty to commemorate this golden anniversary by publishing an online volume dedicated to clinical legal education. This special issue, comprised of eight articles, highlights current and cutting-edge issues faced in the substantive law areas covered by the school's clinical programs.



Current and former faculty gathered at the anniversary reception were: (l. to r.) former Housing Aid Law Office Project Fellow Alison Spiers Divine, Business Law Clinic Director Willow Tracy, Veterans Legal Clinic Director Alex Scherr, former Land Use Clinic Director Jamie Baker Roskie (J.D.'01), Capital Assistance Project Director Curt Nettet, Civil Externship and Public Interest Practicum Director Elizabeth Grant (J.D.'94), Family Justice Clinic Director Christine Scartz (J.D.'94), Business Law and Ethics Program Director Carol Morgan (J.D.'79), Prosecutorial Justice Program Director Alan Cook (J.D.'84), Associate Dean and Mediation Practicum Director Ellie Lanier, former Prisoner Legal Counseling Project Director Tom Killeen (J.D.'74), former Special Education Practicum Director Torin Togut, Criminal Defense Practicum Director Russell Gabriel (J.D.'85), former Family Violence Clinic Managing Attorney Susan Schaffer and Prosecutorial Justice Program Director Melissa Redmon.