

# COMMUNITY GROUP ADVOCACY AND SOCIAL-CHANGE LAWYERING CLINIC:

*UC Hastings College of the Law*

ASCANIO PIOMELLI\*

## TOWARD A BROADER VISION OF LAWYERING

We lawyers tend to think highly of ourselves. Very highly. That's part of what makes us so popular with the public. Our high self-regard is instilled early in law school in the United States.<sup>1</sup> From the outset, we are told — explicitly, tacitly, insidiously — that we are learning a new, superior way to think that will transcend the less rigorous mode of thinking that got us to law school and, it follows, that dooms the rest of society to an inferior state of wisdom and understanding. We are taught that who

---

This article is part of the special section, “Legal History in the Making: Innovative Experiential Learning Programs in California Law Schools,” in *California Legal History*, vol. 17, 2022 (see editor's introduction on page 3).

\* Ascanio Piomelli is Professor of Law, University of California Hastings College of the Law. Many thanks to the generations of students with whom I have been privileged to work in the Clinic, to the lawyers and organizers who supervised their fieldwork, and to my dear friend and colleague, Shauna Marshall, with whom I first designed the class.

<sup>1</sup> My discussion of the legal profession, law school, and the societal and historic context in which the Clinic operates is always limited to the United States. Consequently, I will only occasionally insert this geographic and national qualifier, which is always implied.

we were before law school — our experiences, attachments, values, even sometimes our sense of right and wrong — is irrelevant, even possibly detrimental, to our success as lawyers. We must be molded anew. From Alexis de Tocqueville forward, we have been assured that our professional training prepares lawyers to play an essential leadership role in our society.<sup>2</sup> What a flattering and enticing prospect of a new, wiser, more powerful, professional self. It's hard not to be seduced.

Many have critiqued the narrowness of what law school portrays as “thinking like a lawyer,” but it nonetheless persists. The self-satisfied conviction that lawyers are smarter, wiser, more sober-minded than non-lawyers is a feature, not a bug, of our legal education and profession.

Social justice lawyers are not immune to high self-regard. Indeed, many of us are especially prone to it, viewing ourselves and our tiny sector of the profession as preeminent guardians of marginalized people and as irreplaceable engineers of social change. Law school teaches us, both explicitly and tacitly, that social change stems from brilliant lawyers who strategically craft, sequence, and litigate cases that enable courageous judges to issue groundbreaking decisions. Legal reform and the recognition of new legal rights *is* social change, law school asserts with little rebuttal or qualification. Litigators and appellate judges are presented as expert heroes who change the law and with it our society.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> De Tocqueville asserted that American lawyers were “the most powerful existing security against the excesses of democracy” given their “instinctive love of order and formalities” and that “they entertain the same repugnance [as the aristocracy] to the actions of the multitude, and the same secret contempt of the government of the people.” 1 ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*, ch. XVI (Henry Reeve, trans.) (1835), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/815/815-h/815-h.htm#link2HCH0038>. Even before Christopher Langdell recreated American legal education, de Tocqueville observed:

The special information that lawyers derive from their studies ensures them a separate rank in society, and they constitute a sort of privileged body in the scale of intellect. This notion of their superiority perpetually recurs to them in the practice of their profession: they are the masters of a science which is necessary, but which is not very generally known; they serve as arbiters between the citizens; and the habit of directing to their purpose the blind passions of parties in litigation inspires them with a certain contempt for the judgment of the multitude.

*Id.*

<sup>3</sup> See Ascanio Piomelli, *Rebellious Heroes*, 23 *CLINICAL L. REV.* 283 (2016).

At UC Hastings, my colleague Shauna Marshall and I created the Community Group Advocacy and Social-Change Lawyering Clinic (“the Clinic”) to expose students to — and encourage them to develop their own version of — a different, broader, more inclusive vision of social-change lawyering. The Clinic aims to highlight non-litigation-centered approaches to making social change that entail partnership with activists and other non-lawyers. It positions students to explore how to work collaboratively *with* community groups, activists, and coalitions to jointly press for social change in multiple arenas, rather than working primarily in the judicial system *on behalf of* marginalized clients and communities.

The intent is not to denigrate impact litigation nor to understate the significance of appellate courts’ recognition of new rights or duties. As readers of this journal know, the California Supreme Court has been a national trailblazer in this realm. But many law school classes cover litigation, and almost none cover the sorts of extra-judicial collective efforts that the Clinic explores. Often, those collective efforts play a vital role in creating the social conditions and cultural narratives that enable appellate courts to act boldly. And concerted action is often necessary to try to ensure that judicially created rights are acted on and preserved against backlash.

Nor does the Clinic denigrate the value of lawyers’ specialized knowledge. A central aim of the Clinic is to frame social change as fundamentally about persuasion and to highlight the persuasive power that informed, organized, mobilized publics and communities have exercised in U.S. history. The Clinic encourages students to view lawyering broadly to include any persuasive activity (including collective action) that seeks to convince a target audience to respond as desired. Rather than acting alone to pursue social change, the Clinic encourages partnering with others — especially with those most directly impacted by the systems we aim to change. Our knowledge of the law is one of the valuable additions we bring as lawyers to our partnerships. But we must act as humble, life-sized partners, not demigods or saviors. We must be open to learning from and with those we seek to serve.

---

Parts I and II below discuss the Clinic's genesis, aims, curriculum, structure, and projects. Student voices predominate in Parts III and IV, recounting what they learned or appreciated and sharing their visions of ideal social-change practices. Part V on students' career trajectories profiles a Clinic alum who articulates and has embodied the Clinic's teachings.

## I. GENESIS OF THE CLINIC

### *A. The Backdrop of Mainstream Law Clinic Practice*

Law school clinics in the United States began to proliferate in the 1970s, as influential funders (the Ford Foundation and the Council on Legal Education for Professional Responsibility) economically incentivized law schools to create them.<sup>4</sup> Students too pressed for "relevant" classes where they could learn hands-on how to work with clients and serve low-income communities and social movements of the day (such as the Black Freedom movement, student/anti-war movement, the women's movement, etc.). Initially, many law students worked at outside legal aid offices in precursors to what we now call out-placement or field-placement programs. As the 1970s and 1980s progressed, most law schools across the country began to create what we now call "in-house clinics": on-campus law offices where students earn academic credit to represent clients under the supervision of attorneys. Over time (in some places it took decades), supervising attorneys in clinics became full-fledged members of law school faculties and published articles and books on lawyering skills, lawyers' roles, and approaches to lawyering. Clinics became the place where students and faculty integrated theory and practice as they served lower-income clients and communities.

At the outset, litigation clinics predominated. In those clinics, students represented criminal defendants, tenants, low-wage workers, consumers, youth, survivors of domestic violence, immigrants, all in court cases or administrative hearings. Some handled "small" cases on behalf of individuals, and some handled "large" litigation matters. In the mid-to-late 1980s and 1990s, many schools started mediation clinics where students

---

<sup>4</sup> See J. P. "Sandy" Ogilvy, *Celebrating CLEPR's 40th Anniversary: The Early Development of the Clinical Legal Education and Legal Ethics Instruction in U.S. Law Schools*, 16 CLINICAL L. REV. 1 (2009).

serve as mediators of civil (and occasionally criminal) disputes. In the past two decades, a critical mass of transactional clinics has developed, in which students represent business entities, community development corporations, or social enterprises to structure deals and advise on corporate governance and compliance issues. In the same time span, policy advocacy clinics have also proliferated, where students represent organizations seeking legislative change or pursue their own policy agendas in legislatures or administrative agencies.

For at least the past three decades, almost all law school clinics have taught an approach called “client-centered lawyering.” The concept was developed by Professor David Binder and his colleagues at UCLA<sup>5</sup> to distinguish it from a traditional, lawyer-centered practice in which lawyers make decisions or firmly steer clients toward what the lawyer knows to be the correct, emotionally detached, rational decision on how best to proceed. As initially formulated and typically taught, individual client autonomy is at the heart of client-centeredness. The approach seeks to ensure that clients, not lawyers, make key decisions about what their attorney does or doesn’t do for them — because clients have superior knowledge of their own non-legal needs and interests, are generally competent to make sound decisions when given sufficient information, and must live with the consequences of those decisions. Even if each clinic has its own take on what it means, almost all clinics teach client-centeredness as the approach to lawyering they encourage students to adopt.

### *B. The Space the Community Group Advocacy Clinic Aims to Fill*

Client-centered lawyering has much to commend. It is founded on respect for clients and their decision-making capacity. It urges lawyers to listen carefully to clients and to attend to the emotional aspects of problems, not only the rational ones. It pushes lawyers to understand clients’ full range of aims and interests, both legal and non-legal. In all those ways, it is a step forward from the traditional, lawyer-centered model that remains implicit

---

<sup>5</sup> See DAVID A. BINDER & SUSAN C. PRICE, *LEGAL INTERVIEWING AND COUNSELING: A CLIENT-CENTERED APPROACH* (1977); DAVID A. BINDER, PAUL BERGMAN & SUSAN PRICE, *LAWYERS AS COUNSELORS: A CLIENT-CENTERED APPROACH* (1991); DAVID A. BINDER, PAUL BERGMAN, SUSAN PRICE & PAUL R. TREMBLAY, *LAWYERS AS COUNSELORS: A CLIENT-CENTERED APPROACH* (2d ed. 2004).

in most doctrinal classes in law school and persists among many judges, most explicitly when they push attorneys to exert “client control.”

But client-centered lawyering is a generic approach that seeks to perfect the principal–agent relationship between individual client and lawyer in all practice settings; it isn’t focused on how best to pursue social change. It treats each client as a solitary, unconnected individual. It tacitly confines lawyers’ work to the legal realm. And it typically assumes rather than critiques the adequacy of existing legal processes and remedies. It draws a rigid, nonpermeable divide between the legal realm of courts, adjudicative bodies, laws, and regulations, where lawyers apply our expertise, and the non-legal realm of communities, politics, media, popular culture, etc., which lawyers are neither urged to explore nor expected to navigate.

We created the Community Group Advocacy Clinic for students who aim to become social-change lawyers to introduce them to a broad array of strategies and tactics that lawyers and community activists use — most effectively in concert — to press for change. The Clinic invites students to go beyond client-centered lawyering toward an explicitly political vision of activist lawyering that we explore in depth in the clinic seminar and students put into practice in their field placements. Instead of viewing clients only as autonomous individuals, the Clinic encourages students to treat and interact with clients and constituents as connected (or connectable) *members of communities* with shared experiences and interests. It emphasizes too communities’ capacity to act collectively to challenge and change their conditions and to resist their subordination — that is, to resist relationships and material conditions in which those with power, status, and presumed expertise govern or instruct them, expecting obedience, acquiescence, or even gratitude.

The Clinic, which is offered every spring semester, places students at organizations that work — or, at the very least, that will allow students to work — side-by-side as equal partners with community activists in collective action in the social, legal, and political realms. Students refine their abilities to collaborate as they engage in or connect with community organizing or mobilizing, community outreach and education, grassroots lobbying, coalition work, and media advocacy. Rather than speaking *for* clients and communities, students learn to partner *with* them and with allies from other disciplines to press for social change.

Instead of seeing themselves as preeminent engineers of social change, the Clinic seeks to foster students' humility. It encourages them to reconsider legal education's narrow conception of expertise (as bestowed exclusively by professional credentials) and to appreciate the insights, skills, and energy of communities, activists, and other allies. Broadening students' view of lawyering to include community partners opens possibilities for creative collaboration.

## II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE CLINIC AND ITS SEMINAR

### *A. Student Learning Objectives*

As the syllabus lays out, the Clinic strives to prepare students, through the seminar and fieldwork, to:

- demonstrate critical understanding of the broad range of approaches to social-change lawyering and the primary persuasive strategies in which lawyers and activists ethically engage;
- articulate a detailed personal vision of the social-change practice they aspire one day to implement;
- demonstrate the ability to collaborate effectively — with student partners, field supervisors, coalition partners, and community members — on fieldwork projects implementing one or more persuasive strategies;
- demonstrate the ability to richly describe, critically observe, and introspectively reflect upon their interactions and initiatives in their fieldwork; and
- demonstrate the ability to facilitate a group discussion, to contribute to classroom discussions and classmates' fieldwork projects, and to give and receive effective feedback.

### *B. Academic Component*

The course seminar, which meets in two-hour sessions twice a week, is structured into three segments. It opens with a three-week introduction to several models and examples of activist approaches to social-change lawyering and to organizing/mobilizing collective action. The course's long middle segment explores key persuasive strategies and activities with

which activists and attorneys must be familiar. And the seminar closes by returning to reconsider the models of social-change lawyering and activism in light of students' fieldwork experience and has each student formulate their own vision of an ideal social justice practice.

The first segment explores Jerry López's vision of "rebellious lawyering," Arthur Kinoy's approach to "movement lawyering," the "law and organizing" practice of the Workplace Project in Hempstead, Long Island, founded by Jennifer Gordon, and the "base-building" efforts of environmental justice and Black Lives Matter organizers.

Jerry López, the preeminent social justice lawyering theorist of the past three decades, is the central influence on my thinking about lawyering — and thus the Clinic's. In his seminal book,<sup>6</sup> he uses vivid descriptions of fictionalized lawyers and law offices to sketch his vision of "rebellious lawyering," an approach that prioritizes learning from and partnering with clients, community activists, organizations, and other allies to jointly frame issues and to jointly plan, implement, and assess the success of multi-pronged, collective efforts to resist communities' subordination. He contrasts rebellious practice from what he labels a "regnant" (i.e., reigning) approach, in which self-described public interest lawyers work primarily alone to frame and address issues within the confines of the legal system, disconnected from the clients and communities that they see themselves championing but don't treat as essential partners in their work.<sup>7</sup>

Arthur Kinoy, an unsung American giant, recounts in his autobiography<sup>8</sup> his work as a "people's lawyer" in the 1940s and '50s (working with militant unions and activists to resist the Red Scare) and the 1960s and '70s (working with Black Freedom Movement and student anti-war activists). Like today's self-labeled "movement lawyers," Kinoy sees the lawyer's role as using the legal system to make room for people to organize themselves, to take or retake the initiative, and to use their collective power to press

---

<sup>6</sup> GERALD P. LÓPEZ, *REBELLIOUS LAWYERING: ONE CHICANO'S VISION OF PROGRESSIVE LAW PRACTICE* (1991).

<sup>7</sup> As we discuss, and López elaborates in later works, it is hard to avoid the pull of the regnant approach. No one does so perfectly or at all times, for even as we try to resist systems and practices, we often wind up inadvertently re-creating them.

<sup>8</sup> ARTHUR KINOY, *RIGHTS ON TRIAL: THE ODYSSEY OF A PEOPLE'S LAWYER* (1993).



for social change. Tim Phillips,<sup>9</sup> who took the Clinic in 2007, encapsulated Kinoy’s vision: “a people’s lawyer does her work not to win legal victories, but to help organizers and activists win their own victories.”

Jennifer Gordon, a MacArthur Foundation “genius award” winner, describes in her book<sup>10</sup> the founding, activities, evolution, successes, and limitations of the center for immigrant workers that she founded — and left, once it successfully transitioned to a fully worker-led-and-run organization. She thoughtfully explores the synergies and tensions between law and organizing, and how an organization and its campaigns become and remain member-run. Although she does not call herself a rebellious lawyer, the Workplace Project provides a real-life example of the iterative, continually reassessing and retooling work of putting rebellious ideas into practice. Ariel Test,<sup>11</sup> who took the Clinic in 2008, articulated one of my aims in assigning Gordon’s book when she admitted: “I didn’t think that rebellious lawyering existed outside fictional portrayals. The Workplace Project really demonstrated how wrong I was.” And Adriana Barajas,<sup>12</sup> who took the Clinic in 2021, shared that the Workplace Project gave her “faith and hope in what is possible” and “perspective on what success can look like and what it can mean.”

The middle segment of the course begins by introducing students to the Powell Memorandum,<sup>13</sup> to George Lakoff’s ideas about the power and

---

<sup>9</sup> Tim went on to open a solo civil rights practice in Minnesota representing protesters and activists.

<sup>10</sup> JENNIFER GORDON, *SUBURBAN SWEATSHOPS: THE FIGHT FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS* (2007).

<sup>11</sup> Ariel went on to work as a public defender and youth law attorney in Louisiana.

<sup>12</sup> Adriana, a 2022 graduate, is headed to a position as an eviction defense attorney in San Francisco.

<sup>13</sup> The Memo to the national Chamber of Commerce was a strategically brilliant blueprint crafted by (soon-to-be-Justice) Lewis Powell in 1971 for a multidimensional campaign to be funded by U.S. corporations to re-establish and cement the hegemony of “free enterprise” over American politics, education, media, and society in the face of what he saw as the disconcerting influence that ascendant social movements and left-leaning intellectuals were exercising over politicians and the public at the close of the 1960s and outset of the 1970s. When Clinic students read and discuss the memo, they are incredulous that the Left could ever have been perceived as a serious threat to capitalism, and they are struck by how successfully Powell’s aims were achieved; the nation he sought to create is the one in which they’ve grown up.

necessity of “framing” issues effectively,<sup>14</sup> and to a conceptual framework for recognizing the stages through which disputes develop and how they can be transformed in ways that sharpen or diffuse them.<sup>15</sup> We then explore community legal education, examining more traditional “know-your-rights” trainings (where a trainer instructs an audience on “what the law provides”) and the participatory, popular education approach of the Workplace Project (where a group first discusses its experiences and needs, then hears and questions available legal remedies, and together reflects, if the system doesn’t meet its needs, why it doesn’t and how they might change it). Next, we take a deep dive look at four different models of community organizing or mobilizing: the ACORN model, post-Alinsky faith-based organizing, the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union, and the Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and prison abolition movements. Again, we see that organizers too can be regnant or rebellious. We then explore coalition work and the challenges of working across divides of race and class. Next, we explore lobbying — as traditionally practiced and then, again, the participatory, grassroots approach of the Workplace Project. And finally, we look at litigation, examining the ethical challenges of class action litigation, as well as efforts to connect litigation with other advocacy strategies.

The final segment explores my characterization of participatory democracy as a key connecting thread running through many of the models the course explores,<sup>16</sup> and it introduces students to the work of Ella Baker, an unsung giant of the Black Freedom Movement, whose work exemplifies the idea of democracy as a way of interacting with others. We also conclude our examination of the Workplace Project and the three different iterations of its evolving sense of the proper balance between law and organizing. The course ends with students’ formulation and discussion of

---

<sup>14</sup> See GEORGE LAKOFF, DON’T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT!: KNOW YOUR VALUES AND FRAME THE DEBATE (2d ed. 2014).

<sup>15</sup> See William Felstiner, Richard Abel & Austin Sarat, *The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming*, 15 LAW & SOC. REV. 631 (1980–81). We pair it with a case study of my work in East Palo Alto that illustrates the framework’s utility. See Ascanio Piomelli, *Appreciating Collaborative Lawyering*, 6 CLINICAL L. REV. 427 (2000).

<sup>16</sup> See Ascanio Piomelli, *The Democratic Roots of Collaborative Lawyering*, 12 CLINICAL L. REV. 541 (2006); Ascanio Piomelli, *The Challenge of Democratic Lawyering*, 77 FORDHAM L. REV. 1383 (2009).

their own visions of an ideal social-change practice they hope one day to found or join.

In the second and third segments of the course, every third class is devoted to “rounds” sessions, where students learn about their peers’ fieldwork and give each other feedback and suggestions. Each student also leads one class discussion to give them experience facilitating discussion — a key skill for working with groups.

### *C. Fieldwork Projects*

Several months before the start of the semester, I simultaneously recruit potential field placement projects and students for the class, looking for projects that mesh with students’ interests and backgrounds. I share with potential placements that the Clinic aims to expose students to non-litigation-based approaches to making social change that will enable them to work closely with community members and activists. And I tend to look for projects that involve issues of racial justice.

I explain that unlike a traditional externship, in which students work on a multiplicity of shorter assignments, I seek a single, clearly defined, discrete, three-month-long project on which a pair of students can work together, not separately, for about fifteen hours a week. Projects need not involve any traditional legal research or writing. Instead, I seek projects where students can take responsibility and initiative (of course, within parameters and priorities that the placement supervisor and community partners set), where they can also receive regular feedback and guidance at least once a week, and where they can interact with community members and groups on one or more of the following activities: community outreach or education, community mobilizing or organizing, grassroots lobbying, coalition advocacy, and/or media campaigns.

I share that, if there is a substantive area of law that students will navigate, it must be straightforward enough to learn in only two to three weeks, otherwise the semester will be too short for students to accomplish meaningful work for the organization. I also share that I’m looking for a project that students can take on for thirteen weeks, take as far as they can, and then hand back to the organization. Often ideas for work that have been on a back burner for lack of resources make good projects for student teams.

I have the Clinic formally co-counsel with the placement, so I can be inside the ambit of confidentiality. This enables me to have students write detailed weekly fieldnotes, which they share with me alone, describing and reflecting on their work. And it enables the class to have rounds sessions in which students discuss their projects with each other, sometimes roleplaying interactions, mooted presentations they will give or materials they will produce, and giving each other ideas and feedback. (In a typical field placement program, client confidentiality prevents students from sharing information about their work with their professor or peers.)

I meet with each student team weekly to discuss their fieldnotes and working relationships. To ensure that the placement supervisor, student team, and I all share the same expectations, at the outset of the semester we each sign a written Supervision Agreement laying out our responsibilities. The agreement includes a paragraph-length summary of the anticipated project and a checklist identifying the types of activities in which students will likely engage. Three or four weeks into the semester, students prepare a written memo to their placement, which they first run by me, containing a detailed description of the project and their expected deliverables, a timetable for implementation of each phase of the project, and a section on challenges they anticipate.

#### *D. Examples of Fieldwork Projects*

In 2022, a team of students worked in an urban Central Valley school district with a coalition of community groups seeking to reduce police presence in schools and remove police from protocols for dealing with students' mental health crises. Another team helped a coalition of parents, who had (or are threatened with having) their custody of children terminated by the state, to distill their experiences and policy aspirations into a Family Bill of Rights. A third team worked with a statewide coalition of organizations to advocate for legislation to prevent jails and prisons from transferring people, once they have served their sentences, to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention. And the final team of students mobilized citizens to press their cities and counties to declare support for the Racial Justice for All Act, which would allow anyone convicted of a crime to challenge racial bias in their case.

In 2021, a student team began working with the same education advocacy coalition in an urban Central Valley school district that the team in 2022 continued. A second team met with residents and teachers in a rural Central Valley school district to update a complaint to the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights brought by African American students and families. Another team worked with a statewide coalition to advocate for budget proposals to shift funds from incarceration to reentry and other community-based programs serving immigrant, LGBTQIA, and communities of color. The final team worked with a legal services organization and other youth-serving groups to design and present workshops for middle- and high-school students on how their school district responds to sexual harm and to encourage students to envision how it might do so more effectively and equitably.

In previous years, teams have worked with a nurses' union to develop and deliver community education presentations on how proposals for universal health care coverage would impact racial disparities in health care access and outcomes and, in another project, helped support nurses' leadership, presentation skills, and engagement in public campaigns to publicize a "Robin Hood Tax" proposal on securities transactions to dramatically increase funding for human services. Another team worked with a local collaborative of East Bay immigration service providers to implement best practices for conducting large group-processing events to help legal, permanent residents complete applications to become naturalized citizens. A Clinic team also reached out to impacted communities and potential expert witnesses to design, and recruit broad public participation at, a hearing before the San Francisco Human Rights Commission on "The Human Rights Impact of the War on Drugs."

In a project that I still use as a model of the energy, creativity, and initiative I hope students will exercise in their fieldwork, in 2013 a Clinic team worked with a coalition of prisoners, advocates, and prisoners' family members to publicize the prisoners' hunger strike and seek to end California's extensive use of long-term, often indefinite, isolation in solitary confinement cells in prisons that are already maximum-security facilities. To launch the campaign, the students drove, assembled, and reassembled a full-size replica of a SHU ("Secure Housing Unit") at events across the state to enable people to visualize and enter a solitary confinement cell. They joined with families to participate in a state legislative hearing and

to protest outside it. They created a social media campaign and designed t-shirts publicizing the campaign to end torture. They even spent their spring break on a visit to Pelican Bay state prison to meet prisoners, whose voices they amplified through social media.

### III. WHAT STUDENTS REPORT LEARNING OR APPRECIATING

The next two parts share the experiences, voices, and visions of Clinic students from reflection papers they submitted for the course.

#### *A. The Classroom Community*

Spending four hours a week with classmates committed to social justice work, sharing each other's experiences, values, reactions, and dreams, often builds a powerful, supportive sense of community that is, sadly, rare in law school classes. As Alysyn Martinez, who will graduate in 2023, wrote in 2022:

Being able to share space with like-minded people who care deeply about the same values and core goals that I do, allowed me to really find my voice again . . . I have appreciated so much their ability to listen and learn, while also providing their own insights in a respectful and affirming way. It is a completely different environment from any I have ever seen. There is something incredibly inspiring about being able to sit with people that you know care just as deeply as you do about the issues presented and hear them present new ideas that I had never considered or heard of. It was such an honor to hear their thoughts, and it gives me confidence to know that I can share space with them. It's also very comforting to know that people like them exist in law school and in the world in general.

In 2019, Taylor Boutelle<sup>17</sup> shared: "The ability to discuss the readings, our projects, and our personal experiences thoughtfully, with people who had such different life trajectories than me, really pushed my understanding and views." In 2021, Nicole Tashovski<sup>18</sup> added: "Listening to my

---

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, a 2020 graduate, went on to join the East Bay Community Law Center on its health law team.

<sup>18</sup> Nicole, a 2022 graduate, is headed to a judicial clerkship with the North Carolina Supreme Court.

classmate’s ideas and the passion they spoke with helped renew my passion for the work each week. Being surrounded by like-minded individuals you can share ideas with and learn from is my favorite way to expand my thinking.”

### *B. Personal Growth*

Students in all clinics often learn not only important lessons about lawyering, but also come to see and understand themselves differently. María D. Dominguez<sup>19</sup> wrote in 2013: “Sometimes what matters more is not the work we do, but who we become in the process. I leave the Clinic more confident about who I am and what I want to do. Sustainable social change requires continual renewal and reflection. This Clinic provided a safe, nurturing space” for that reflection.

Courtney Oxsen<sup>20</sup> wrote, also in 2013, that the Clinic gave her and her clinic partner

an expanded sense of our individual capacity as change agents and advocates. The placement forced us to take initiative, be creative thinkers, collaborate, and creatively problem-solve. Because of how busy things were, we were constantly reassessing our needs and learning how to prioritize our time and the tasks that needed to get done. The limits on our time compared with our expansive goals also forced us to learn lessons in boundary-setting with a supervisor . . . . We also learned how to navigate advocacy within a community that is impacted by an issue we are not connected to personally. We feel confident that the connections we made . . . were genuine, and they respected our presence and participation in the movement as legitimate.

### *C. Exposure to Activities and Models to Emulate or Avoid*

Sometimes, students are placed to work with attorneys they consider embodiments of the sensibilities and practices we discuss in class. Megan

---

<sup>19</sup> Since graduating, María has worked as a community organizer, a dependency attorney working to keep families together, and a county health equity policy planner.

<sup>20</sup> Courtney began her career as a public defender and now is a habeas corpus attorney.

Armstrong,<sup>21</sup> for example, wrote the following paean in 2021 about her supervisor, Linnea Nelson of the ACLU of Northern California's Racial and Economic Justice team:

Linnea is a wonderful model of a community lawyer. She does not act as though she knows what is best for [the community], or that it's her way or the highway. She has absolutely no air of being high and mighty. She does not believe that as a lawyer she is somehow more knowledgeable than the community members she is working with. Instead, she collaborates with members of [the coalition]; she works *with* them on their goals of educational equity and serves them through her work. During meetings, she speaks as a collaborator and sometimes as a facilitator, rather than as a leader. She does not dominate discussions. The main leaders of the conversations at [coalition] meetings are members of the [local] community. Linnea will often ask clarifying questions about what their goals and wants are, will inform them of certain legal information or legal proceedings, and will participate in idea-generation, but she would never tell them what would be best for them. Linnea also does not act as though she is too good for certain jobs; she is happy to be the note-taker at almost every meeting, for example. In these ways, Linnea rebels against the idea that communities are not the experts of their own issues and the idea that she is the most prestigious expert in the (Zoom) room. Seeing Linnea in action taught me that it is possible to be a lawyer who doesn't suck. It is possible to be a lawyer who collaborates directly with communities.

And other times, students see a stark contrast between the ideas and approaches we discuss in class and the practice of their placement. Andrea Banks,<sup>22</sup> for example, wrote in 2008 that her experience at her placement was “mostly about learning or solidifying already held beliefs about what kind of lawyer I did *not* want to be . . . rebellious lawyering does not mean just working with people, it's about *how* you work with people.”

---

<sup>21</sup> Megan, who graduated in 2021, completed a post-graduate fellowship at the ACLU of Northern California and is now a legal aid attorney in San Francisco.

<sup>22</sup> Andrea worked for many years as a staff attorney at Bay Area Legal Aid before recently taking a position as a government attorney.



Many students report the Clinic was their first exposure to organizing, to understanding what organizers do, and the different models of organizing. As Sarah Fielding<sup>23</sup> wrote in 2013, before the class she “was not entirely sure what a community organizer does.” She learned “just how useful” an organizer can be to “increase the leverage of the group they are working with.” Although she was not interested in doing it full-time, she gained respect for organizing and hoped to learn how to effectively collaborate with organizers. For others, like Michael Astanehe,<sup>24</sup> the Clinic provided a first exposure to coalition work. As he wrote in 2015, “I had never witnessed a coalition before, so [at first] I found the readings hard to conceptualize . . . . But now I see the benefits and dangers of working in a coalition.”

A few students enter with an organizing background. Cecily Vix<sup>25</sup> wrote in 2004, that before the Clinic, she “hadn’t connected how to be both a lawyer and an organizer. The progressive lawyering models we learned in class taught me that a symbiosis of tactics can be a very useful tool when trying to make social change.” In 2013, María D. Dominguez wrote that she was particularly interested “in reconciling the role of community organizer with the lawyer role,” because she was “somewhere in between and feeling like the lawyer role would eventually be more dominant in my life.” In the end, she determined she could view her “community organizer-lawyer role as a continuum which could take different colors and shapes at any given time, depending on the circumstance. I didn’t have to choose one or the other; there was a way to be in both worlds.”

#### *D. Transformation of Their Vision of Lawyering and Sense of Possibilities*

Brian Lambert<sup>26</sup> wrote in 2004: “The Clinic helped me better understand and envision the kind of role I can serve as an attorney and the kind of

---

<sup>23</sup> Sarah went on to become a legal services attorney in rural Northern California. In 2022, after giving permission to include her quote, she added: “I wish pretty much every day that I had more organizers up here . . . so many more folks stand up for their rights when they are standing with others. I take the lessons from the Clinic with me daily . . . .”

<sup>24</sup> Michael, who graduated in 2015, opened a solo private practice representing workers, tenants, and small investors.

<sup>25</sup> Cecily went on to work as an attorney for the National Labor Relations Board.

<sup>26</sup> After a fellowship with the ACLU of Northern California Racial Justice Project, Brian has long worked for the Office of Civil Rights of the federal Department of Education.

organization I want to work with. It helped me understand that I do not have to be a lawyer serving in a traditional and limited role, but I can really be creative and find ways to be the best and most effective advocate possible.” Mike Russell<sup>27</sup> wrote in 2007: “what I’ve learned at the Clinic has transformed not only my career’s trajectory, but what kind of lawyer I want to be.” Another student wrote in 2008: “My definition of a public interest or social justice lawyer has shifted, been twisted inside out, washed in the river, and hung up to dry. I am not sure that it is even recognizable anymore. But that is a good thing. I could not have asked for a better introduction to the complexities of public interest law.”

Students of color and from working-class backgrounds have shared that the Clinic helped them see space for themselves in the profession. Vasmer Vang<sup>28</sup> shared in 2021: “I cannot express how formative this past semester has been for me . . . It is the one rare space in law school I have felt safe, uplifted, and recognized in my power.” Holly Miller<sup>29</sup> wrote in 2008:

When I began to seriously consider becoming a lawyer, and began working in a law office, I came face to face with my worst fear, the socialization process I would be expected to endure and ultimately accept to move from my working-class self into the world of the professional upper middle class. This process would surely steal my identity, it would strip from me any attachment I had to the community I came from and those I sought to work with. In the end, I would be an imposter in two worlds, a member of neither the community from which I came nor the community

---

<sup>27</sup> Mike has worked as a legal aid attorney in Alaska, the Texas Rio Grande Valley, and in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2022, after giving permission to be quoted, he shared: “In every job I’ve had, I’ve kept the syllabus and reading materials from the Clinic on my office bookshelf. It’s there right now. It’s there when I need a reminder of what inspired me to do this work in the first place, or how I can do it better.” He added, “Fifteen years into my career, I focus on group advocacy at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. What I learned at the Clinic has not only guided me to this point in my practice, it informs what I do every day working with clients fighting for a different future.”

<sup>28</sup> Vasmer, a 2022 graduate, is headed to a position as a legal services attorney in Central California.

<sup>29</sup> After graduation, Holly went to work at California Nurses Association/National Nurses United, serving briefly in its legal department, then primarily as policy director, and now as chief of staff.

to which I was now conscripted . . . . But taking the language I learned in the Clinic and making it my own has changed all that. I don't actually have to change myself; I don't have to make myself less. I can expand my understanding of myself as a social change lawyer. The affirmative roadmap I envision for myself now as a collaborative lawyer is fuller and more rewarding, more in line with my values and instincts, than I could ever have imagined. It allows me to strip away constraints I thought I had no other choice than to accept.

She continued, the Clinic gave her “the language to express my concerns, the courage to grapple with them, and the will not to fall victim to the same failings as many lawyers.” She concluded, “lawyering is not just *what* you do or *why* you do it, but *how* you do it. It's not about working *for* but working *with*.”

In 2021, Leena Sabagh<sup>30</sup> wrote that the Clinic “completely transformed my perception of the legal field and my role as an attorney in bringing social change. It provided me a new framework, theories, and language for viewing the legal and social justice field and with training on how to implement these into my future practice.” She added: “Law school had stripped from me the ability to think creatively, but this clinic allowed me to dream beyond a strict legal lens and understand that other strategies are possible. It has made me a more radically hopeful person that freedom and liberation is attainable in our lifetime.”

Megan Armstrong shared in 2021 that the Clinic “has been pivotal to my journey to become a lawyer. It helped me to align my lawyering style to my values and will enable to me to be an effective advocate for justice.” She added that “the idea of *dreaming bigger*” continually recurred to her: “The law is limiting, formal, slow-changing, and archaic. By pulling on other methods and working with many different types of people, we can instead act with creativity . . . and attack an issue on multiple fronts. We *can* think and dream bigger.”

---

<sup>30</sup> Leena, a 2021 graduate, completed a postgraduate fellowship at the San Francisco Bay Area office of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and is now a fellow with CAIR's Los Angeles office.

Vasmer Vang in 2021 wrote that the Clinic helped him see that lawyering “can be so much more than just going to court and relying on judicial remedies to solve community issues, so much more than the neat little box that law school and other attorneys make it out to be. It is what you make of it. You can create your own form of lawyering.”

#### IV. STUDENT VISIONS OF THEIR IDEAL PRACTICE

One of the final written assignments asks students to describe the ideal social-change practice they hope one day to start or join. The assignment invites them to pull together what they’ve learned over the semester and use it to envision how they hope to put into practice the lessons they’ve learned from our readings and discussions, from their fieldwork projects, and from their other professional and life experiences and values.

Students read their peers’ descriptions, and in our last class we discuss each one for fifteen minutes. With only minimal initial modeling by me, our discussions become powerful affirmation experiences, as student after student points out what they appreciate about each peer’s vision.

Nicole Tashovski noted in 2021 that the act of describing her ideal practice in writing helped her see that “it *is* possible to achieve my goals.” And Alysyn Martinez observed in 2022 that the assignment showed her that “all our practices are what we make of them. We all go into the profession with ideals and values that we hope to embody, but actions speak much louder than intentions. We can be blind to the negative impacts of our actions, if we are not diligent and self-reflective.” Paulina Santana<sup>31</sup> shared that the discussion of everyone’s ideal practice made clear that “there is no *one* type of social movement lawyer. It’s not about the work you do or the job you have. It’s about how you live and how you engage with others . . . . How you enter each space not just as a lawyer but as a human being.”

Below are three lightly edited examples of students’ ideal practices. They illustrate the breadth and diversity of students’ visions and also reveal shared themes.

---

<sup>31</sup> Paulina, a 2022 graduate, intends to begin her career as a public defender.

### *A. Andrea Banks' Ideal Practice*<sup>32</sup>

ANDREA BANKS: If I am going to practice law, I envision it being in a very holistic setting, somewhere that is welcoming to the people it serves and useful in a variety of ways. Because there's so much to starting a practice that I don't know, I envision my ideal practice to be joining an existing but possibly newer organization.

The organization that I would want to join would be a small neighborhood organization located in the neighborhood I live in or close by, so that I can bike to work. It would be new enough that there was still excitement and momentum to change for the better, but established enough that some of the necessary, day-to-day functions had been worked out and there was a sense of trust built within the community. Somewhere between three to seven years would be ideal. The space would be in an old house or building with a porch or a good stoop. There would be more than one floor. It would get decent light, and the windows would open. There would be an outside area in the back or on the side that could be a community vegetable garden which the kids living in the house would participate in maintaining.

The organization would have started as a woman's community organization and small, long-term (roughly one-year) shelter for immigrant women and children. The woman who started the organization would have done so after long being part of the community and seeing the need for these services. Over time, the organization would have evolved and hired a lawyer (also a woman), after realizing that many of the women accessing their services had a variety of legal issues and it was difficult for them to access help, particularly with immigration and domestic violence issues. All staff would be bilingual, as most of the clients speak only Spanish.

The organization would have a focus on self-sustainability. All the women who live in the house are active members of the organization. Many of the program ideas came from the women and their real needs while living in the house. The organization originally ran a variety of classes the women had requested, including English language classes, job training skills, financial skills, parenting, and nutrition. The classes changed and expanded over time, and some became open to the larger community. In

---

<sup>32</sup> Andrea, who as noted above worked as a staff attorney for many years at Bay Area Legal Aid, described her ideal practice in 2008.

exchange for staying there, the women maintain the house and alternate cooking meals. The head of the organization felt it important to have these requirements to give structure to everyone's day and make everyone feel invested in the house. There would be a job board and education information posted in the house, and the focus of the organization would be to provide housing as well as life skills training to get the women back on their feet and supporting their family. The women would rotate childcare based on a self-made schedule so others could attend school or jobs during the day or evening. There are weekly house meetings where grievances are discussed and solved and new schedules for childcare and cooking are made to best accommodate each woman's needs.

The lawyer was originally hired to deal with the legal issues facing the residents. Almost all had immigration issues, some had minor legal issues, and many were relying on public benefits for health care. All were looking for permanent housing. Instead of having to go to several different lawyers to get help with a variety of legal problems, the head of the organization thought it better to have one lawyer in-house, who could work with the women with all their interrelated legal issues. Slowly, other people in the neighborhood began coming in with legal problems. The lawyer had too much work, and so another lawyer was hired. This would be me.

The organization would still be very small at this point, only employing the director, the original lawyer, me (the new lawyer), a receptionist/ secretary, and an office manager. Both the secretary and the office manager are women who formerly lived in the house, because the organization feels that a strong policy of hiring from within helps both the organization and the women. As the new lawyer, my job is to add legal education classes to the classes women take in the house and to help with the drop-in clinic that has spontaneously formed. After speaking with the women in the house individually and hearing their stories and problems, I set out to create classes that will be useful.

The classes would be structured loosely as know-your-rights courses to establish a basic knowledge of how the law does and does not protect rights and how it can be used for the women's benefit. The classes would change and evolve as needed to be useful for the women. Over time, the classes would be opened to the public and the community members who have been coming in requesting legal help. New topics and formats would be added to suit the growing need.

The legal clinic would be the other part of my job and would focus more on typical direct services. We would have drop-in hours in the morning Tuesday to Saturday for any legal issue we deal with. If we don't deal with an issue, then we offer referrals to other local agencies that might be able to help. There would not be separate days for separate issues, because many times people's legal problems overlap. And if a person takes time off work to come to the clinic, we don't want them turned away simply because we didn't designate that day for that specific issue.

The clinic would be on the first floor of the house, and the reception area would be welcoming and friendly. It would be painted a cheerful color (but not garish), and there would be plants in the windows. The receptionist would be bilingual in Spanish and English, and she would be *very* nice and cheerful. She would give each client an estimated wait time and explain that sometimes it takes longer. There would be plenty of seating and a water cooler or pitcher with cups. The seating would be arranged in an informal fashion, not in rows like an airport. There would be toys and games for children and magazines in English and Spanish. There would be lots of literature concerning services in the area, services that we provide at the house, and different fact sheets about issues of importance. The waiting room is very important, because first impressions matter, and coming to a legal services agency is often intimidating and scary. The waiting room should try its best to feel welcoming and homey with amusements to occupy people and their children while they wait.

As the organization grew and services expanded or changed, there might be room for a policy position or someone with litigation experience who could do class-actions. But for the most part, that work would be shipped out to other organizations, so that the focus of the organization could remain on providing quality services for the women who live in the house and those who come to the legal clinic.

### *B. Leena Sabagh's Ideal Practice*<sup>33</sup>

LEENA SABAGH: My ideal social-change practice would be in a mid-size-to-large city in a neighborhood centrally located and easily accessible to

---

<sup>33</sup> Leena, who as noted above has been a post-graduate fellow at the Council on American Islamic Relations, described her ideal practice in 2021.

the community it serves. Ideally, it would be near public transportation to ensure members can access it even without cars. The building itself should have a few private offices or rooms, larger spaces for collaboration, an outdoor space with a garden, community pantry, playroom for children, and a kitchen. It would be a space the community comes to not only to organize, but to build interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging based on shared principles and identity. It would be a clean but homey space with comfortable couches, and posters, photos, and quotes showcasing the history of the organization and prominent struggles and movements for social change and human rights across the world. These posters and inspirational messages would be in Arabic and various other languages spoken by the membership. It would also have computers, white boards, and comfortable seating to facilitate collaboration and democratic participation. In the lobby, there would be job postings, fliers from other organizations regarding their campaigns, and schedules for workshops, clinics, and classes.

I would ideally work for an organization in which I was not an outsider. The organization would thus focus on the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) and Muslim community. I would join the organization a few years in, after some membership, programs and short- and long-term goals have been established based directly on the decisions of the members and community. The organization would focus on building leadership and self-reliance, a strong sense of community, and putting the communities' struggles in context with other international and domestic fights for social change. The language used to conceptualize this would be the language of human rights, liberation, and freedom. We would not focus on one tactic or strategy for bringing social change but instead experiment and use multiple tactics to achieve our goals and constantly assess their effectiveness and be flexible to changes over time.

Membership of the organization would be comprised of community members who have gone through educational and leadership training. There would be four to five trainings spread over five months for potential members to join. One training would focus on the theories and history of movements across the U.S., to conceptualize the MENA and Muslim struggles and fight for social change as part of a larger history in this country. Another training would focus on connecting the problems MENA and Muslim communities face in the U.S. to larger issues



of imperialism, racism, and state repression. This will allow members to understand their daily lives and struggles as interconnected to those they faced in their home countries and around the globe and as stemming from many of the same structures and powers. The third and fourth sessions would analyze strategies and tools used in democratic social-change campaigns, as well as leadership skills. It would cover coalition-building, policy work, lobbying, direct action, use of media, etc., much like we have done in this class. The last session would give the soon-to-be members a hypothetical campaign or issue to work on where they would develop their own strategy and tactics and then present to the membership committee. This would be followed by a “graduation” celebrating their new skills and knowledge.

The organization would consist of a community organizer, an administrative assistant, operations manager, two attorneys, and members. The administrative assistant and organizer would come from the membership once the organization was established. The rest of the positions would also ideally reflect the community. One of the attorneys would focus on legal clinics and educational workshops. These workshops would be established based on trends and issues presented in clinics, raised by membership, or recent events or changes in the larger community. A few workshops would be more regularly offered to deal with the consistent legal issues the community faces, such as immigration and interactions with the FBI and other law enforcement. Legal clinics would have weekly drop-in hours for non-members to speak to an attorney. These non-members would also meet with the lead organizer and attorney to incorporate less traditional legal and non-legal strategies, like collective action or self-help. They would also be encouraged to become a member and complete the training. At first, this lawyer’s main source of understanding of the local MENA and Muslim community would come through the legal clinics. This attorney would also work with the community organizer in outreach to mosques, churches, local restaurants, cafes, and stores frequented by the community to recruit members and hear directly from the community.

The second attorney would focus on litigation and keeping a pulse on regional, national, and international issues, and on building relationships with relevant organizations across the country. This attorney would report this information back to the staff and membership to keep them informed

on larger political and economic forces and issues that may affect members at the local level. This attorney would also be responsible for maintaining contact with policy makers and lobbyists and update them on what is happening at the grassroots level. But this attorney would have no decision-making power without a vote from the membership. Once voted upon, the membership would also be actively involved with the attorney in this task, and eventually completely maintain it.

Litigation would only be pursued upon a consensus from the membership and as a last resort — to remove barriers to the community organizing itself. If litigation were voted for, it would be pursued in tandem with other tactics and strategies for maintaining pressure; it would be accompanied by campaigns, coalition-building, protesting, and other strategies.

The benefits of membership would include access to the legal clinic and direct representation if needed. The larger community would still have access to legal clinics through drop-in hours. Members would also have access to the amenities of the property, like the kitchen, community garden, workshops by other community members, a community pantry, and possibly even some childcare. Most importantly, the membership would make the strategic decisions of the organization and carry out those decisions through a membership committee. The agenda would be open to whatever the membership feels necessary to discuss, making them the key decision makers.

The organization would not just provide services and be a place of organizing, it would also provide a space for the community to grow and flourish. It would be a place where community members would become empowered to lead their own social change, provide support for one another, and develop interpersonal relations that carry on beyond the walls of the organization. It would be like a second home for the community to learn new skills, support one another, and raise their family around.

The end goal would be to eventually have the organization completely self-reliant on the membership and for all positions to be filled by community members. There would possibly be one lawyer working part-time with the organization who continues to assist with the legal clinic and workshops and the rare possibility of litigation. The hope would be to work myself and others out of our jobs.

### C. *Paulina Santana's Ideal Practice*<sup>34</sup>

PAULINA SANTANA: My ideal social-change practice would be a decentralized abolitionist organization with different chapters across the nation. While the organization would center its focus on criminal justice work, we would also offer several related legal and social services and be involved in various campaigns, projects, and practice areas.

*Anti-policing/Anti-prison.* At its core, the organization's mission would be to abolish all carceral systems and reinvest resources into our communities. It would work in coalition with other abolitionist organizations on anti-policing/anti-prison projects and campaigns, including policy advocacy, protests, and impact litigation.

*Individual Representation.* In addition to these larger-scale projects and campaigns, we would also have a direct legal services branch, where criminal defense lawyers would assist in the defense of those who have been charged with crimes. Like public defenders and other attorneys working pro-bono, these attorneys would provide legal assistance for zero cost. However, these lawyers would all be trained in client-centered, trauma-informed lawyering. They would work *with* clients, not just *on behalf of* them, to determine the best legal strategy together.

*Housing and Social Services.* Because so many individuals targeted by our criminal punishment system have housing and mental health needs, we would also have trained professionals in the organization who would work in tandem with interested community members to provide resources and assistance.

*Inside-Outside Mail Program.* I would want to coordinate a mail program where we contact folks on the inside. In addition to responding to legal mail, we would establish some type of pen-pal program for more general emotional support. We would open this up to all interested community members so that they may also engage and communicate with people on the inside.

*Re-entry Services.* For those who have been released from jail or prison, we would also offer a variety of re-entry services, or at the very least connect people to the best organizations that may be better able to offer support.

---

<sup>34</sup> Paulina, a 2022 graduate, who as noted above intends to begin her career as a public defender, wrote this description in 2022.

*Educational/Legal Clinics.* The organization would also prioritize community engagement and education. This could include a course where people from the community come in, learn some of the specifics of the law from lawyers, but then go on to lead the course themselves for other community members.

We would also offer a course on how to represent yourself in a criminal proceeding. While we will have criminal defense lawyers to offer guidance and support for the more technical legal specifics, I would want people to feel like they can access this information on their own. I would seek to create an environment where folks feel they can confront the legal system with the help of their communities, not just lawyers.

Finally, we would offer each of these courses in different languages. We would also hold weekly, social language-exchange events. We would provide food and drinks and give people a space to enjoy themselves and interact with other people in the community. This would not only promote community relationship-building, it would also allow people to practice speaking other languages.

*The Structure.* It would be cool if the people who worked in the organization didn't just stick to one area but rotated between these different practice areas and projects. Not only would this hopefully prevent burn-out, but it would allow them to integrate lessons and values from one sector to another.

*Location.* I don't envision just one location or one headquarters. I would want the organization to have many chapters across the nation, each capable of running itself and accountable to the community it serves. There will be no hierarchical structure.

The location I would want to work out of would probably be in the Bay Area. Ideally, I would want the center to have an open floor plan to encourage collaboration amongst all the different people in the organization. It will have high ceilings and get tons of natural lighting. There will be plants and colorful art everywhere. We will have smaller rooms where we hold our legal clinics and courses.

*The People.* While some of the details of the day-to-day operations are still fuzzy, I know that my social change practice will be comprised of kind, compassionate, and deeply caring individuals. At the end of the day, the bonds and relationships we form through our work and our passions is more important to me than the small operational details.

Above all, I would want my practice to truly prioritize self-care and community-care.

I hope to create an environment where we all feel safe, supported, comfortable, and content. I would want the work to be energizing for people, and when it's not, I want people to know that's okay too. This work is hard and taking care of yourself while doing this work is hard. Burnout is real. Having moments of doubt/frustration or moments where you feel like you're drowning won't be viewed as a personal issue or a personal failing. I hope people in the organization will feel this is something that can be problem-solved together and not be afraid to be honest about needing extra support. This is all to say: I hope the organization is truly a community that prioritizes not just work, but people.

## V. PATHS CLINIC ALUMS HAVE TAKEN

As reflected in the footnotes identifying former students' post-Clinic work, the vast majority do become social justice lawyers. A few, less than ten percent, decide not to become lawyers. Most who have become lawyers launched their careers doing direct services, often in legal aid offices, and sometimes proceed to work in policy advocacy. A few have started their own solo firms. Several have worked for unions. Later in their careers, some have taken government positions. Although rare, a handful of students have joined the organization at which they did their Clinic fieldwork.

The career path of one former student, Sheena Wadhawan, who took the Clinic in 2006, has encompassed many of those paths and embodied the Clinic's teachings. Sheena began her career as an attorney in the Neighborhood Law Corps of the Oakland City Attorney, where she collaborated with city agencies, nonprofits, and community organizers to bring City resources to support community efforts to preserve affordable housing and to combat the harms of the foreclosure crisis on low-income tenants. Three years later, she launched a solo firm representing tenants in Oakland, which she did for two years.

She then moved across the country to work with CASA de Maryland, a large, activist, grassroots, immigrants' rights organization. Serving first as a staff attorney and then as Legal Program Manager, she engaged in the full range of approaches covered in the Clinic: organizing, mobilizing,

grassroots lobbying, coalition-building, media work. After five years at CASA, she became the Advocacy Director of the D.C. Employment Justice Center, working with a team of organizers, staff, and low-wage workers in grassroots campaigns, coalition-building, lobbying, and communications. She then briefly took a position with the federal Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education.

Moving with her family a year later to Los Angeles, she left the law, becoming deputy director of Everyday Feminism, an intersectional feminist media site, where she supported staff and executives to create a diverse, inclusive, non-hierarchical organizational culture. Having experienced countless micro- and macro-aggressions as a woman of color in social justice campaigns and workplaces, in 2017 Sheena launched and continues to operate a solo organizational consulting firm, where she coaches legal and other nonprofits' management teams (and sometimes entire staffs) to help them live up to their professed values.

In 2016, for a clinical conference recognizing Jerry López on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Rebellious Lawyering*, Sheena recorded a video describing the impact López and the Clinic had on her. She shared:

I came to law school with a clear goal of wanting to work for social justice, for a more just and equitable world. I always wanted to serve low-income folks, folks of color, immigrants, because that's the community I come from.

When I came to law school, I had no idea what to expect. I had never known any lawyers. I didn't have mentors in my life at that time. By about halfway through law school, I had met a lot of lawyers — guest speakers in classes, professors, people like that — and I didn't really see myself in any of them. By halfway through, I thought, "Oh, I'm not going to practice law. I'm not going to be a lawyer. I'm not like these people, and I can't do this work this way." I didn't really understand what about it repelled me, but I knew it didn't fit with my sense of how the work should be done.

At that point, I entered the Community Group Advocacy Clinic and we read *Rebellious Lawyering* and other works. The teaching and mentorship of my clinical professors led me for the first time to think and feel: "Oh wow, maybe I can do this. These are the type of

lawyers, this is the concept of lawyering that can work, that really fits with my sense of what works in communities and the kind of work I want to do.” It gave me a framework and the words to use to really understand the kind of lawyer I wanted to be. And that I wasn’t out there alone, that there were others out there thinking about how we do this work and insistent that communities and clients are in the best position to lead the work.

Now, out doing social justice work, I feel so grateful for being able to work alongside communities. I’ve experienced plenty of defeats, but also a fair number of successes, which absolutely came about because they were client-led and community-driven and because I was able to stay true to that guiding principle. I have returned to what I learned in the Clinic again and again to check myself, to be self-aware, and to try to stay true to the meaning of rebellious lawyering: recognizing our privilege and responsibility to do this work *alongside* communities, not *for* them.

In all the settings in which she has worked, Sheena has exemplified values and practices the Clinic aspires to nurture: creativity, tactical and strategic flexibility, humility, a broad vision of lawyering, faith in collective action and the wisdom of impacted people, and commitments to collective liberation and to fighting against subordination everywhere, including in our relations with clients and communities and in our workplaces.

## CONCLUSION

It is an honor to have the Community Group Advocacy and Social-Change Lawyering Clinic included in this issue on “legal history in the making” and deemed to be “promoting positive change in the law and society.” In preparing this article, I had the pleasure to reread two decades of students’ reflections, reminding me once again how much I have learned from and with them. I am delighted to convey their thoughts and grateful to have played a role in encouraging them to think expansively about lawyering and working in partnership with communities — and to see so many of them go on to do just that.