

1-1-1996

## Concentrating in Depth: Students Can Now Choose a Specific Area of Practice

UB Law Forum

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### Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (1996) "Concentrating in Depth: Students Can Now Choose a Specific Area of Practice," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 9 : No. 1 , Article 12.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum/vol9/iss1/12](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol9/iss1/12)

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# Embracing Change

## CONCENTRATING IN DEPTH

**Students can now choose  
a specific area of practice**

An important element of UB Law School's New Curriculum is the creation of upper-division concentrations in selected areas of practice. Once fully implemented, these concentrations will provide students with the opportunity to enroll in sequenced selections of upper-division courses, starting with introductory surveys and progressing to advanced offerings, seminars and clinical experiences.

Taken in sequence, concentrations will provide in-depth understanding of particular practice areas, opportunity for focused and related research and writing experience and, in many cases, innovative practice opportunities in which students provide supervised legal representation.

"The idea is to turn out new lawyers who are better prepared to practice," says Dean Barry B. Boyer.

The Law School implemented its first upper-division concentration during the fall 1995 semester. The Affordable Housing and Community Development Law Concentration grew out of UB's innovative clinical education initiative in Affordable Housing and Community Economic Development, which has been in place since 1987.

The core of the curriculum concentration consists of a flexible sequence of transactional, clinical and academic courses. The curricular sequence occurs pri-

marily over the course of one academic year, geared to second-year students but open to third-year students as well.

The first semester of the core sequence consists of three blocks, each roughly four weeks in length. A three-credit course

sequence begins in Block #1 with a survey course, Introduction to Affordable Housing and Community Development Law, a prerequisite for both the concentration and the development clinics. This course, a "gateway" to the concentration, presents an overview of community development, housing policy and programs, enterprise forms, and the real estate development process.

Blocks #2 and #3, the remainder of the first semester, include a menu of courses, and each student must enroll in at least two. Each of these courses focuses in greater depth on a particular type of transaction or on a specific area of public policy formation and implementation. These "mini-courses" involve practice-oriented writing and simulated transactions or policy problems.

Four mini-courses were offered in fall 1995, with more planned for upcoming years. These included:

- Not-for-Profit Corporations and Taxation — exploring the role of non-profit organizations in housing and enterprise development, and the legal environment encountered by counsel representing such groups.
- Worker Ownership Transactions — simulating the start-up, acquisition, and restructuring of business corporations involving employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs) or other mechanisms for employee ownership or participation.
- Finance Transactions — analyzing the array of perspectives among participants in a complex corporate financing transaction, and simulating the lawyer's role in representing selected community institutions.
- Affordable Housing: Policy, Programs and Transactions — examining the use of low-income housing tax credits in development transactions, and placing this approach in the context of federal and state housing policy.

Block #4 marks the start of more reflective writing. In consultation with faculty, each student in the concentration produces a term paper thesis and research plan during this Block. Interested students who have successfully completed a research plan and the first semester sequence may enroll in a Development Law Colloquium for the entire second semester, consisting of Blocks #5, #6, and #7.

Students in the second-semester colloquium work on their term papers, with an ultimate goal of publishing them as articles in the Journal of Affordable Housing and Community

Development Law, housed at the Law School and published quarterly and co-sponsored with the American Bar Association. Students and faculty discuss their on-going research and coordinate disparate efforts where possible. Faculty invite practitioners, policy-makers and scholars to broaden and inform the perspective of the colloquium participants, and involve graduate students and faculty from other schools and departments in the university from time to time.

Senior editors for the ABA-sponsored Journal are selected annually from among the previous year's colloquium participants. Second-year students participate under the direction of the senior editorial board.

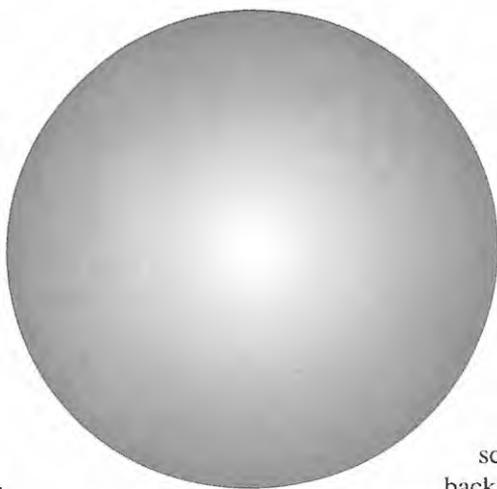
All students in the concentration enroll for at least two semesters in the Affordable Housing Clinic or the Community Economic Development Clinic. Students may conduct this clinical work at any time during their second or third years, provided that they have completed or are concurrently enrolled in the gateway course. Students in the concentration are encouraged, but are not required to enroll in related courses such as Tax, Real Estate Finance, Land Use Planning, Corporations and a range of other courses involving transactions.

The faculty participants in the Affordable Housing and Community Development Law concentration, and advisors for the ABA Journal, are Professors Philip Halpern and Peter R. Pitegoff and Clinical Instructors Thomas F. Disare, Lauren Breen, and George M. Hezel. Additional concentrations in Family Law, Environmental Law and Race and Racism are planned for the 1996-1997 academic year.

According to Audrey Koscielniak, assistant dean for career development, "Concentrations give students credibility in specific practice areas. Experience — the ability to actually do law — makes them more immediately productive for the employer."

Students are generally enthusiastic about the opportunity to specialize while in law school. Lindsey Hazelton, a second-year law student, says that concentrations fill an important gap.

"Most courses give you only a broad overview of different legal topics. Now we can study a particular area of interest in depth. That's very helpful in today's job market, where specialized skills are attractive to prospective employers. A completed concentration on a student's transcript not only indicates an interest in a specific area of law, but also a strong foundation of practical experience. Naturally, those who avail themselves of the



opportunity will have an advantage over those who have not developed a niche before graduation."

After completing Blocks #1-3, Hazelton says, "These courses were by far the most practical since beginning law school. Instead of working backward through case law, we took a forward-looking approach to

hypothetical situations that would be encountered in the real world.

"I especially enjoyed Lauren Breen's course in Non-Profit Corporations. The teaching style and course structure were realistic within the short timeframe. Rather than being expected to memorize the entire non-profit statute, we learned how to find certain answers if we were ever faced with certain situations. The courses also reinforced my interest in pursuing a clinical experience in this area."

Holly Beecher, another second-year student who participated in the concentration during the fall semester, shared many of Hazelton's experiences. "Law school definitely needs to be supplemented by some sort of work experience," she says. "As long as it is possible to strike a balance between bar courses and a concentration, I think offering a closer look at certain topics can be very valuable."

A certified social worker, Beecher was drawn to the concentration by her interest in creating stronger communities. "I wanted to learn more about the lawyer's role in community development and how to help others achieve more productive lives. In that respect, I related best to the non-profit course and would be interested in doing further coursework in this area.

"I also enjoyed the interaction with students who were already enrolled in one of the clinical programs. Hearing about their hands-on experiences was both insightful and encouraging." ▲