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## Domestic Violence Clinic

UB Law Forum

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### The Rights of Humankind

The Program on Human Rights Law and Policy is directed by Law Professor Virginia Leary and Political Science Professor Claude Welch. Its emphasis is on human rights, broadly defined to include both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights.

A chance encounter at a Baldy Center short course led to a computer-age application of this ancient philosophical debate. Law student Scott T. Johnson, in conversation with Leary and Welch, set out to establish a group to monitor the performance of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. This U.N. tribunal is gathering evidence and hearing the cases against Bosnian Serb soldiers who are accused of crimes against humanity in that country's long, ethnically motivated civil war.

So Johnson established Tribunal Watch, an Internet newsgroup — a computerized mailing list of more than a hundred human rights activists, political activists, attorneys and law students interested in following the trials. Newsgroup members — in Serbia, Australia, across Europe and throughout the United States — have discussed the background of the cases, the philosophy behind the genocide, even shared reading lists.

"It's been a fascinating intellectual and activist dialogue," Johnson says.

He spent time last summer in The Hague, where the tribunal is located, and is negotiating for electronic access to the trial proceedings and press releases. He says part of the newsgroup's mission is to ensure that the U.N. does its job.

"We want this tribunal to succeed," he says. "We're not just going to sit back and observe, we want to really get involved. It's really going to be a significant set of trials. They've got a great set of judges, and the prosecution is wonderful. It's not just a show. It isn't a joke. It really has potential, and we'd hate to see it messed up if the U.N. pulls the plug on funding the tribunal.

"We have a voice within this small niche." ■

# Domestic Violence Clinic Receives State Funding

**T**he Domestic Violence Clinic in the University at Buffalo School of Law has received more than \$20,000 in local-initiative funding

from the Western New York delegation to the New York State Legislature.

The funding includes \$14,000 that was included in last year's state budget, but was frozen due to the deficit at the end of the legislative session, and \$7,000 in this year's budget.

The money will be used to continue the clinic's work in Erie, Niagara and Monroe counties, said Suzanne E. Tomkins, clinic instructor.

"This three-county study of responses by police and social service agencies to incidents of family abuse is putting us in a position where we will be able to say what works and what doesn't, what kinds of intervention make a difference in dealing with this problem of violence against women, and how we can take our knowledge and convert it into effective

programs," says Dean Barry B. Boyer.

Part of the Law School's Legal Assistance Program, the clinic combines academic training in domestic-

violence issues with real-world experience.

Students earn academic credit while providing more than 150 hours a week of free assistance to social-service agencies and legal offices, including the district attorney's offices in Erie, Niagara and Monroe coun-

ties; Neighborhood Legal Services; Women's Law Center; Legal Aid of Niagara County, and Haven House, a shelter for battered women in Buffalo.

They are involved in a variety of projects, such as compiling and editing a resource manual on domestic violence for Niagara County, assisting law-enforcement agencies in evaluating their policies and working with the Erie County District Attorney's Domestic Violence Unit.

In Niagara County, students work in the district attorney's office

*"This three-county study of responses by police and social service agencies to incidents of family abuse is putting us in a position where we will be able to say what works and what doesn't."*

and with the domestic-violence community coordinator assisting in the prosecution of domestic-violence cases, drafting protocols and implementing a county-wide response to domestic violence.

In Monroe County, students help with the prosecution of cases in the district attorney's office, and assist clients of Monroe County Legal Aids Family Courts Project.

In addition to providing direct legal services, students are engaged in research projects, including a recidivism study in Rochester City Court.

The clinic, established in the fall of 1992, grew out of the Domestic Violence Task Force that Tomkins — a 1992 UB Law graduate — and other law students developed six years ago. The volunteer, student-run task force assists local lawyers who provide pro bono counseling to family-violence victims. The volunteers also act as advocates for women involved in Family Court proceedings in both Niagara and Erie Counties. ■



*Suzanne E. Tomkins*

## UB LAW'S TOMKINS RECEIVES AWARDS FROM SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

**S**uzanne E. Tomkins, a co-founder of the Domestic Violence Clinic in the University at Buffalo School of Law, has received several awards from social service organizations.

Tomkins received the Exemplary Service Award from the Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence. She served in 1994 and 1995 as vice chair of the coalition, which is composed of agencies and individuals working together to stop all types of family violence, including the abuse of children, the elderly and partners.

She also was named Citizen of the Year — along with Bernadine Butler, a 1994 UB Law School graduate, and third-year UB Law student Julia Hall — by the Western New York Division of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). That designation led to the trio receiving the same honor at the state level.

The NASW awards recognize the work of Tomkins, Butler and Hall as co-founders of the Women's Law Center, Inc. The law center, with offices in Buffalo and Clarence, is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1993 to meet the legal needs of women who do not qualify for free legal services, but who cannot afford a private attorney.

The center offers legal services in the areas of divorce, custody, visitation, support, domestic violence and related issues on a sliding-scale fee based on an individual's income; provides on-site, legal rights orientation programs throughout Erie County on topics of law that impact women, and identifies and forges links with other existing services in the community in order to provide a comprehensive response to the client's overall needs.

Tomkins, a 1992 graduate of UB Law School, serves as clinic instructor in the Domestic Violence Clinic, part of the Legal Assistance Program in the law school. The clinic, established in 1992 to meet the unique legal needs of survivors of family violence, brings the issue of domestic violence into the law school curriculum, with students receiving academic credit for their work.

Students working in the clinic have been involved in a variety of projects, including compiling and editing a manual on domestic violence for incarcerated women, working in various legal agencies providing legal assistance to victims of domestic violence, assisting in the development of the Buffalo Police Department's pro-arrest policy and working with the Erie County District Attorney's Domestic Violence Unit, the Niagara County Domestic Violence Intervention Project and the Monroe County Office of the District Attorney.

While a student at UB Law School, Tomkins also helped set up the school's Domestic Violence Task Force. The volunteer, student-run task force, now in its sixth year, has several extracurricular projects under way. These include assisting local lawyers who provide pro bono counseling at a weekly clinic and acting as advocates for women seeking orders of protection in family and criminal court.

Tomkins received a bachelor's degree in political science from Buffalo State College. She resides on Grand Island, N.Y. ■