

10-1-2011

## Doing Good, Leaning Well: Restructuring of Clinical Program Mixes Efficiency and Education

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum)

---

### Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (2011) "Doing Good, Leaning Well: Restructuring of Clinical Program Mixes Efficiency and Education," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 24 : No. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum/vol24/iss1/11](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol24/iss1/11)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact [lawscholar@buffalo.edu](mailto:lawscholar@buffalo.edu).

## CLINICS

DOING GOOD,  
LEARNING WELL*Restructuring of  
clinical program  
mixes efficiency  
and education*

**U**B Law School's clinical legal education program – the roster of legal clinics in areas from affordable housing to family violence, mediation to environmental issues – is undergoing a major restructuring intended to make the clinics' work more efficient and more effective as both an educational tool and a community service.

Under the leadership of **Professor Kim Diana Connolly**, director of clinical legal education, the clinical professors are meeting monthly to put into place initiatives that grew out of a faculty strategic planning retreat led by Professor Peter Joy of Case Western Reserve University, a national expert in the field.

As an initial step, they are implementing shared-use management software that standardizes record-keeping among the Law School's seven clinics, recording vital information on each client, and storing it all on a secure server. The program, similar to software used by law firms, "makes it easier for faculty to do the things we need to do," Connolly says. "And it exposes students to this type of software and demonstrates best practices to them." The software also manages conflict-of-interest checking and makes it easier to transition cases between students across semesters.



Professor Kim Diana Connolly

The server-based storage (clinic records until now have been kept by individual professors) will also allow for secure communication between students and professors, no matter where they are. "If I'm speaking at a conference in D.C.," Connolly says, "and a student needs to show me a document that she needs to file, I can pull that up without anyone having to e-mail it, and it's secure."

The software system is just one part of an overall shift in thinking for UB Law's clinical legal education program, Connolly says. "The clinics for the most part have been operating independently," she says. "Now we're moving to a law firm model, one in which we have obligations to one another." Those obligations are manifold – the clinics' obligations to their clients, the faculty members' obligations to each other, the school's obligation to the students (who are, after all, paying customers), and what Connolly terms "our global duty to produce excellent lawyers."

Those obligations are at the heart of planning process that is producing an overall mission statement and drafting a three-year strategic plan that sets out a vision for the clinics, a set of collective goals and some steps for how to get there. The strategic plan will be brought to students, the full faculty and members of the local bar before it's finalized.

"The faculty are sharing a sense of, 'What is it going to take to continue this amazing work and graduate practice-ready students?'" Connolly says.

The longer-term goal is to identify "the ideal set of clinical offerings for UB" – examining whether, for example, students are seeking more opportunities to litigate or do legislative drafting, and deciding how to meet those needs. Connolly points out that the clinics are fully subscribed now – they're operating at capacity given the faculty resources available.

Drawing from her own student experience at Georgetown University Law School, where she did small claims and Social Security disability work in clinics, Connolly wants to integrate the clinical program more fully with the rest of UB Law's curriculum, asking non-clinical faculty to become of counsel for a clinic in their area of academic specialization. "Students are hungry for practical experience, but students are also hungry for brilliant professors," she says. "High-level theory can be an integral part of real-life practice.

"Students are hungry to do something that matters. My hope is that those who are part of the clinical program, when they leave the school, will be closer to practice-ready than they were before."