An Opportunity for Change: New Professor Anjana Malhotra Will Establish an Immigrant Justice and Human Rights Clinic

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Anjana Malhotra will establish an immigrant justice and human rights clinic

It was during her undergraduate years at Duke University that Anjana Malhotra had her mind opened to a whole different way of looking at the world.

Malhotra, who grew up in Hyde Park, N.Y., says that at Duke "I was broadened significantly in terms of my intellectual and political interests and analytical capacity. I also became very interested in civil rights issues and racial justice." Malhotra also became involved with an organization that promoted diversity on campus, and was recruited to participate in institutional efforts to address racial conflict and promote equality at a university level.

Then, a year before graduation, she went with a Duke delegation to Beijing and a huge NGO Forum on Women. The experience changed her. She began studying critical approaches to economic theory, and after graduation worked for local and national organizations in union organizing, strategy and research.

"In working on these organizing campaigns throughout the country, I really came to see how people were leaving their rights at the door," Malhotra says. "People could get fired for merely exercising their federal rights, with devastating consequences to them and their families. To understand the issues at stake at each workplace where workers requested my assistance with their organizing efforts, I had to learn the federal and state labor laws and standards that were in place to assess each employer’s compliance and challenges in workers’ exercising their rights. Seeing the systematic discrepancies between the law and the reality of employer practices that flout that law in workplace after workplace motivated me to go to law school and make the law real in people’s lives."

Malhotra graduated in 2002, cum laude, from New York University School of Law, where she worked as a student advocate in the school’s Immigrant Rights Clinic for two years, representing immigrants at risk for deportation or who faced workplace violations. Following law school she had a fellowship with the American Civil Liberties Union’s Immigrants’ Rights Project; worked on immigration and securities cases with the New York City firm Wilmer, Cutler, Pickering, Hale and Dorr; and handled labor law class-action cases with Gladstein, Reif & Meginniss, also in New York. In August 2011, she joined the Seattle University School of Law, where she launched and co-taught the school’s Civil Rights Amicus and Impact Litigation Clinic.

Now Malhotra is joining the SUNY Buffalo Law School faculty, where she will teach a seminar on theories of social justice lawyering and, in spring 2014, establish a new immigrant justice and human rights clinic.

"It’s exciting for me to be back in my home state and teaching and supervising students to address civil and human rights issues I have long cared about."

— Professor Anjana Malhotra

If the clinic she has run at Seattle University School of Law is any indication, work on major immigration civil lawsuits is another possibility. Under her supervision, students in the Seattle clinic are leading the appeal challenging the constitutionality of an Arizona law banning ethnic studies in primary and secondary schools. The state selectively enforced the law, says Malhotra, who is of Indian-American heritage, to eliminate the Mexican-American studies program in the Tucson Unified School District. In April, Malhotra and her students filed an appeal in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit on behalf of Tucson students challenging the law. While at SUNY Buffalo, she will continue in her role as lead appellate litigator in the case and incorporate the case into the immigrant justice clinic.

Having worked in a variety of legal settings—public-interest law, private practice, a clerkship in the Ninth Circuit federal court of appeals—Malhotra says she has learned that teaching makes the best use of her gifts and her interests. "I’ve always been interested in clinical work," she says, "and I decided that I love teaching, I love cultivating knowledge and engaging with students on their work, understanding of the law and hearing their legal theories."