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My experience at UB Law School

By Maia Jaliashvili

I am a lawyer working for a human rights watchdog organization – the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association in Tbilisi, Georgia. In an international competition I was awarded a domestic violence fellowship to spend four months at UB to expand my legal theoretical knowledge about domestic violence through participation in the UB Law School Family Violence Clinic and to apply that knowledge back in Georgia.

At UB Law, I took classes in domestic violence and in U.S. family law with widely recognized faculty experts in these fields in the United States. With the help of this qualified staff, I was given the chance to participate in the DV clinic, which was a great way to gain valuable practical experience. The clinic let me understand the problem as part of the whole system and learn ways of dealing with it from different perspectives.

For people like me, coming from developing countries that adopted DV law only a couple of years ago, this type of education is not only impressive, but priceless. In my country, all the lawyers working in this field are self-educated. This clinic experience is the perfect way to integrate domestic violence issues in legal education and raise the awareness of new generations about these issues. And this type of clinic makes a huge change in the development of civil society and shaping its way of thinking.

As a visiting scholar, I had the opportunity not only to attend classes, but also to observe the whole domestic violence intervention system in Buffalo and see it from different perspectives. I also intensively observed the work of various officials and professionals in the family violence intervention system in Buffalo and Erie County. I have had access to social workers concerned with family violence as well as to judges and other personnel at the innovative Erie County Family Justice Center and the Integrated Domestic Violence Court. I also had a chance to visit a DV shelter in Buffalo, and I was very impressed with it.

The work done in the clinic is priceless, because there is a unique way of presenting your experience, sharing it with others and then discussing it in class that makes it so significant. With the help of the remarkable staff of the DV clinic, I also had an opportunity to participate in DV activities around the state, attending meetings and conferences to talk in person with well-known experts in this field. The whole program was organized in such an effective way that I learned everything about DV in just four months.

I think this fellowship is a unique opportunity for a lawyer, and I am fortunate to have this opportunity. Maybe after I set up this kind of DV clinic in my country, I will feel more comfortable having finally achieved the primary goal of this fellowship.

Editor’s note: The late-summer conflict between Russia and the Republic of Georgia has added a level of uncertainty to Jaliashvili’s plans to open a domestic violence clinic in Georgia. Professors Isabel Marcus and Suzanne Tomkins have offered their assistance if needed.