



Left to right: Lauren Martin, BLS '20, Debi Schrock, AA '87, Gillian Chadwick, Randall L. Hodgkinson, Haeli Maas. Photo by Jeremy Wangler

Preparing Students

The Next Generation of Students Gain Practice while Helping the Community.

By Angela Lutz

Lauren Martin, BLS '20, is still a student at Washburn University School of Law, but she has already interviewed clients, drafted pleadings, prepared for trial, and even presented a case in court. As an aspiring family law attorney in her second semester with the Washburn Law Clinic, she recently worked on a complex guardianship case and was able to secure a positive outcome for the children involved, boosting her confidence and her preparedness for her future career.

“At the clinic as a student, you’re doing it all yourself,” Martin said. “It’s the best experience you can have in law school because it’s 100 percent practical, and it feels really good to help out members of the community.”

Since 1970, the Washburn Law Clinic has allowed students to gain essential legal experience while also providing pro bono

services in the areas of family justice, immigration, civil law, and criminal defense to members of the community who could not otherwise afford an attorney. For Gillian Chadwick, clinic director and associate professor, the clinic offers students an incredible educational and service opportunity.

“The clinic is a unique way for students to take on the responsibility and experience of being a lawyer while still having support from faculty,” Chadwick said. “Our clients are amazing, and the students enjoy getting out of the classroom and engaging with people. It helps them remember why they went to law school, which is often to help people.”

In addition to altruism, the clinic’s primary mission is to encourage students to become competent attorneys by letting them take the lead on cases. This level of autonomy is made

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possible through the certified legal intern program, which allows law students to gain practical skills under the supervision of a licensed attorney. The law school also has a cooperative agreement with the Kansas Appellate Defender Office, to offer a Criminal Appeal Advocacy clinic, which gives students the chance to work with a staff attorney on briefs.

“It’s a great opportunity to teach students about the real-world aspects of representing indigent clients,” said Randall L. Hodgkinson, a state public defender and visiting assistant professor who has worked with Washburn students since 2006. “It’s rewarding when they see how the real legal world works. I hope my clients get a better appeal because they have me working on it, and the students – that’s another benefit of the program.”

Students are also regularly involved with large-scale community events and have achieved amazing results. Some recent projects have included assisting with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals renewals, expungement and clean slate events, and estate planning for health care workers during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. This commitment to social justice boosts students’ enthusiasm and self-assurance in a big way.

“Once they get their first client interview or court appearance under their belt, you can see their confidence begin to build,” said **Debi Schrock, AA ’87**, managing director of administration at the clinic. “By the end of the semester they have experienced so much of what it is like to practice as an attorney – being responsible for clients, managing their caseloads, negotiating with opposing counsel, interacting with courthouse personnel – they begin to see themselves as attorneys.”

Like Martin, Washburn Law student Haeli Maas has gained tremendous experience that will help her in her future career as an attorney. Now in her second semester at the clinic, Maas has found that she loves working with clients, such as the couple she helped prepare for the U.S. citizenship test by creating study guides and working with them on weekends.

Support Washburn Law Clinic

The Washburn Law Clinic plays a vital role in students’ legal education, giving them real-world experience while also helping underserved clients who could not otherwise afford representation. To carry out this mission, the clinic operates on a “shoestring budget,” said Gillian Chadwick, director and associate professor, which is why support from Washburn alumni and the surrounding community is so vital.

“Having a community that believes in the clinic is wonderful,” Chadwick said. “The more support we have the more we can expand our services and raise the profile of the clinic and the law school – and that’s always a good thing.”

According to Jeffrey Jackson, interim law school dean and professor, the Law Clinic is the second-largest provider of pro-bono civil legal services in the state of Kansas – additional funds would enable the clinic to expand and educate more students and serve more people.

“Washburn as an institution has always been founded on the idea of helping people, and this is one very effective way that we can do that,” Jackson said. “The Topeka community is among Washburn’s biggest supporters, and we feel an obligation to give back. It shows how valuable Washburn can be to the surrounding community.”

To give to the clinic, visit wualumni.org/schooloflaw and select “School of Law Clinic Fund.”

“They were an older couple, and the man said he had been waiting 50 years to become a U.S. citizen,” Maas said. “I only worked with them for a small portion of their journey, but it was a very high point in my clinic experience. I will graduate and feel confident after having worked in the clinic – there’s nothing better in terms of how to learn.”

For Chadwick, these types of experiences are precisely what make the Law Clinic so special – and why she’s grateful to be surrounded by a supportive network of Washburn alumni and community members whose generosity allows this important work to continue.

“I’m very proud of the work we do in the clinic, both in terms of the education we provide to students and the service we provide to the community,” Chadwick said. “In just 14 weeks our students can transform their practice and go into the world much more confident and prepared – and they’ve also had this wonderful experience getting to connect with clients.”