



UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA LAW CLINIC



VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The introduction of Clinical Legal Education in Nigerian legal education was inevitable due not only for the changing trends in the global legal education and practice but also for the fact that the traditional teaching methodology became grossly inadequate in training legal practitioners that would be competent and sensitive to the legal and even non-legal needs of the society around them.

Imparting the practical knowledge and skills; attitude and worldview became imperative in modern dispensation as the new demands of a lawyer can hardly be made or taught by theoretical lectures.

The Nigerian society had already stereotyped lawyers as crooks, cunning, hard and uncaring people; and unfortunately, the calibre of legal practitioners that are the products of the traditional curriculum could not, either in theory or in practice, appreciate let alone dispel these primordial assumptions of an ordinary Nigerian.

Often times, lawyers find it difficult to establish the nexus between the theories they read and the reality of the practical legal needs that confronts them daily. And hence they become professionals without the necessary philosophy and guidance within which to operate.

Similarly, the compelling need to see law as an instrument of social justice and societal reorientation precipitates the agitation to have lawyers who will appreciate the inter-disciplinary connection between law and other areas of human endeavours that are crucial in delivery of legal services.

Experience has shown that the basic requirements of legal education in modern Nigeria engenders the need to change the mental, socio-political, and cultural outlook of law students, to make them appreciate the primary legal needs and assistance required in their immediate environment.

To this end, NULAI (Network of University Legal Aid Institutions) was formed in 2003 to provide a vehicle to advocate for the introduction and development of Clinical Legal Education in Nigeria. As a non-profit and non-governmental organisation, NULAI promotes clinical legal education, reform of legal education, access to justice and legal aid in Nigeria. Several Clinics were therefore established as in –house in some Law Faculties one of which is University of Abuja Law Clinic.

INTRODUCTION OF CLE IN UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA

The University of Abuja Law Clinic was established in 2008 after the Universities' participation in and winning the 3rd National Client Interviewing Competition in December 2007. Consequently, the University of Abuja Law Students represented the country and came fourth in the international edition of the competition held at Bangalore, India in April 2008.

Ever since, the University of Abuja Faculty of Law became an active participant in all activities and programs of NULAI Nigeria, both staff and students have benefitted immensely and their capacities have been built greatly.

OBJECTIVES

- To provide legal aid for indigent members of the community.
- To advocate for access to justice and Human Right
- To serve as a laboratory where students learn through real legal practice
- To provide an opportunity for law students to appreciate the social perspective of legal practice.
- To expose students to some new areas of Law and vital professional skills
- To serve as an avenue for capacity building for both staff and students of the Faculty

COMPONENTS

The CLE program runs two components:

- i. The teaching component
- ii. The Service component

TEACHING COMPONENT

Earlier on, the University Senate approved the teaching of the CLE curriculum and the two courses were mounted as LEGAL PRACTICE I & II and LEGAL PRACTICE II & III for first and second semester 400 levels and first and second semester 500 levels respectively.

Below is the two-year course outline as developed for Nigerian Universities by Network of Universities Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI-NIGERIA).

1. LEGAL PRACTICE I (4 UNITS) *1ST SEMESTER 400 LEVEL*
 - a. Client Interviewing and Counseling
 - b. Legal Writing I
 - c. Legal Research and Analysis
 - d. Field /Clinical Work

2. LEGAL PRACTICE II (4 UNITS) *2ND SEMESTER 400 LEVEL*
 - a. Ethics, Discipline and Professional Responsibility.
 - b. Information and Communication Technology.
 - c. Legal Writing II.
 - d. Field /Clinical Work

3. LEGAL PRACTICE III (4 UNITS) *1ST SEMESTER 500 LEVEL*
 - a. Alternative Dispute Resolution
 - b. Introduction to Practice Management.
 - c. Clinical work

4. LEGAL PRACTICE IV (4 UNITS) *2ND SEMESTER 500 LEVEL*
 - a. Public Interest Lawyering
 - b. Access to Justice
 - c. Clinical work.

The above outlines a carefully designed 2 year curriculum that contains the basic skills required by a modern lawyer. It is a functional approach to the study of Law in a very interesting and engaging manner. The course status is elective at present, though there are moves towards proposing that the course be made compulsory for students in the 4th and 5th year Students earn four (4) credit units for a course

THE SERVICE COMPONENT

The service component on the other hand exposes students to live clients' cases. Here, students handle interview and counseling of clients, alternative dispute mechanism sessions, prepare briefs under supervision of qualified lawyers, and follow the lawyers to court to handle some matters that end in litigation on *pro bono* basis.

The University of Abuja Law Clinic started operating as an in-house Clinic in December 2008. Before the end of same year, the Clinic received donation of office equipments from McArthur Foundation through NULAI-Nigeria.

The clinicians receive live clients and conduct the initial interview, open files for the client and take charge of the matters under close supervision of the tutors who are qualified legal practitioners.

The Clinical program is an opportunity for aspiring lawyers to learn how to do 'the lawyers work' while still studying. What is emphasized in CLE is the use of interactive teaching methods and clinical approaches such as simulations, role plays; video clips; exercises, brainstorming, tutorials, assignments, moot/mock trials and other skill based competitions. Others includes site visits, internships, street law programs e.t.c

THE CLINIC AREA OF OPERATION

The UniAbuja Law Clinic operates presently as a general clinic with specific interest on issues relating to access to justice. The Clinic however has embarked on specialized clinical projects such as prisoners right, educating the public, especially the local community on their basic legal rights as well as women and children rights etc.

For the prison program, the clinic visited some prisons, interviewed inmates and handled cases and for several indigent inmates. Several inmates were eventually released under this project while other cases were referred to our partners. Other projects that borders on community legal education were also carried out by the clinic.

STAFF PARTICIPATION

The staffs Coordinators are responsible for supervising the work and other activities of the students. The staff oversee the running the administration of the Clinic. They are also directly responsible for handling matters in court. Other lecturers of the faculty may also be required to help either specifically in handing matters before the court or in other ways as may be required.

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION

Students in the fifth year are expected to participate in the Clinic. They are directly responsible for consultations and taking instructions from clients under the supervision of their coordinators or other qualified lawyers from the Faculty. Students consult the clients, give advice, prepare documents and correspondence, manage files and conduct research on their own.

Students hold file consultation sessions with either the coordinator or other qualified lawyers periodically. Student Clinicians must always come prepared to

discuss and raise questions over files they handle or any other matter related thereto.

The clinical aspect exposes students to real live clients and the complexities involved in solving intricate legal issues as well as simple legal and problems. One of the interesting aspect is that students becomes sensitive to ethics and professional responsibility that is central to the legal profession.

There's no doubt that the success of the clinic program depends largely on the passion and commitment as student clinicians, for such an endeavor will demand the necessary discipline, compassion and devotion that is associated with legal practice. There are however some challenges such as the erratic and incessant closure of the Universities and the ability of students to balance the work in the Clinic and other demands of other courses in the Faculty.

PICTURES OF SOME CLINICIANS THEIR COORDINATORS & ACTIVITIES.







