

Legal Aid Clinic

Douglas County Legal Aid Society at KU Law

The Legal Aid Clinic at KU Law offers students the opportunity to fine-tune their lawyering skills in a **fast-paced**, live-client setting by representing low-income clients under the careful guidance and thoughtful teaching of supervising attorneys. Since 1967, the Legal Aid Clinic has been working to secure “justice for and to protect the rights of the needy” in a wide range of **civil and misdemeanor criminal** cases. All clinic students must become licensed for supervised practice through Kansas Supreme Court Rule 719, which requires a minimum of 60 hours of coursework.

The clinic is structured around three inter-related educational components: a weekly class meeting, formal and informal supervision, and live-client representation under Kansas Rule 719. At the weekly class meeting, students might discuss and troubleshoot cases through **case rounds**, apply lawyering **skills through simulations**, or discuss readings about **social justice**, skills application or substantive law. When possible, speakers from the community and the local bar will share their insights from practice. In supervision sessions, students work **one-on-one with faculty members** to review performance, discuss case work, engage in critical assessment, and form professional identity.

The Legal Aid Clinic faculty strives to select and assign cases that offer the greatest opportunity for impact and growth. Each semester, the faculty will focus on a social justice issue, substantive law theme or population to help focus and stimulate learning. Some recent areas of representation include:

- **A criminal practice for juveniles charged with crimes in Douglas County District Court;**
- **A criminal practice for adults charged with crimes and municipal violations in Lawrence Municipal Court; and**
- **A civil practice that may include protection from abuse, consumer advocacy, or disability rights enforcement.**

The highlight for many clinic students, however, is the opportunity to take the lead role in representing clients — from initial interview and counseling, to court appearances and motion arguments, through settlement or trial — thereby building confidence and competence throughout the semester.

Legal Aid Clinic Faculty



**Melanie DeRousse, Director
Clinical Associate Professor**
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Melanie DeRousse serves as both a clinical associate professor and director of KU Law's Douglas County Legal Aid Clinic. The clinic's educational focus is to engage law students in real-world, client-centered practice where, under the guidance of supervising attorneys, they can develop their lawyering skills, substantive area expertise, and ability to engage in the critical self-reflection that will be essential to their development as ethical, diligent members of the profession. DeRousse's responsibilities as director are to refine, develop and promote the clinic's educational focus, to seek out funding and relationships that will assist in the clinic's mission, and to teach student-attorneys the art of competent, client-centered lawyering with an emphasis on access to justice.

DeRousse's scholarly interests focus on the intersection of state and family, particularly in the context of poverty, public health and child welfare. She draws upon her experience in practice as well as her work before law school implementing a diversion and rehabilitation program for pre-adjudicated juvenile status offenders

in Florida and South Carolina. She is a graduate of the Washington University in St. Louis School of Law, where she competed on the national trial advocacy team and participated in a top-ranked civil justice clinic. Before joining the KU Law faculty, DeRousse was an attorney at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri Inc., where she focused her civil practice on the legal needs of survivors of intimate partner violence. DeRousse was a frequent presenter and panelist at Missouri Bar CLE programs and community education events. She also clerked for the Hon. Kathianne Knaup Crane at the Missouri Court of Appeals, Eastern District. She joined the KU Law faculty in 2015.



**Meredith Schnug, Associate Director
Clinical Associate Professor**
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¹ Primary office:

Meredith Schnug serves as a clinical associate professor and associate director of the Legal Aid Clinic. The clinic provides students an opportunity to develop their lawyering skills while promoting access to justice and providing high-quality legal services to low-income clients. In her role, Schnug supervises students in their casework and co-teaches the classroom component of the clinic, with the goal of

developing purpose-minded and practice-ready attorneys. Schnug's work with students emphasizes the value of high ethical standards and professionalism, practical problem-solving skills, and collaboration with community partners to provide clients with the best representation possible.

Prior to joining the faculty, Schnug served as a senior attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, where she supervised attorneys, paralegals and law clerks, represented victims of domestic violence in family law and immigration matters, and advocated for children in abuse, neglect and dependency cases. She also coordinated and presented at several community education forums. Schnug received her law degree from the Washington University in St.

Louis School of Law, where she participated in the Civil Justice Clinic. Her research interests include trauma-informed practice for attorneys and the impact of the law on families and children.

- ◆ **Although housed in and generously supported by the law school, the Douglas County Legal Aid Society is an independent 501(c)(3) charitable organization created through collaboration between the law school and the Douglas County Bar Association. It has been in continuous operation since its incorporation in 1969 and boasts a strong roster of alumni in public and private practice across the country.**

Real Experience; Real Difference



Gaining experience, building trust:

Tristan Tafolla, L'10

Tristan Tafolla had already completed the Criminal Prosecution Clinic, but he enrolled in the Legal Aid Clinic to “see both sides of the coin.” He noticed that he really built connections with clients while defending their interests. Tafolla, L'10, advocated for a mother of two who faced up to 90 days in jail for repeat offenses of driving with a suspended license. “It was pretty clear-cut; she did it,” Tafolla said. “It was a matter of how the sentence should be carried out.” After explaining the situation – single mom, recent bad divorce, no money for auto insurance – Tafolla negotiated a deal in which his client spent just two days in jail, the statutory minimum, and served the rest of her time on house arrest. “There are some cases that really tug at the heart strings,” he said, “especially when children are involved.”

Questions...

What commitment does this involve?

⇒ Effective summer 2015, this is a [one semester clinic](#) which awards [6 credit hours](#) (this means approximately 21-24 hours of work weekly). This intensity matches the pace of a law practice and allows students to more fully immerse themselves in their client representation work. Students who excel may be invited to engage in client representation for a second semester as a Senior Intern for 3 credit hours.

What are the pre- or co-requisites?

⇒ [Trial, Evidence, and Professional Responsibility](#) are required. Criminal Procedure could be helpful. Under Kansas Supreme Court Rule 719, to be certified for student practice, you must have completed [60 hours](#) of course work.

When is court scheduled and what if it conflicts with class or work?

⇒ Our court appearances for municipal court are often on Tuesday afternoons and our juvenile dockets tend to take place on Wednesday afternoons. Protection from abuse dockets are on Friday afternoons. While we have some leeway in scheduling certain matters, the juvenile and municipal court appearances are the bulk of our current practice. Thus, in considering your schedule for your clinic semester(s), it is helpful if you try to keep Wednesday afternoons and Tuesday afternoons free from other obligations. In a pinch, KU Law professors have been gracious in excusing students from class for court. A proactive approach in scheduling your classes can help you to avoid having to ask.

How can I learn more?

⇒ You are welcome to email clinic faculty members to schedule an in-person meeting to talk about what you might expect from your experience. If you want to talk to recent clinic students and/or alumni, we can probably make that happen. Perhaps the best way to see [clinic students in action](#) is to drop by the Douglas County courthouse on a Wednesday afternoon. Email us to let us know you're coming.

How do I apply?

⇒ Submit an application (available in room 105 or by email) along with a current resume and a (non-official) copy of your transcript. Schedule an interview with clinic faculty. We will let you know whether you are approved to enroll before registration begins.