

Build them clinics, and they will come

The race to offer practical training is on

By Petra Pasternak
RECORDER STAFF WRITER

Lisa Cisneros didn't want to drop \$100,000 for a fancy J.D. only to arrive at her first job unprepared.

She realized from talks with practicing attorneys and potential employers that while class work encouraged analytical thinking, it didn't offer the hands-on experience that would allow her to enter the job market ready to practice.

"Practicing attorneys would tell us that they graduated from law school and didn't know what they were doing," said Cisneros, a Boalt Hall School of Law student. "Investigating, drafting briefs, doing legal research — none of those experiences jump out of a case book or out of a professor's lecture."

She said Boalt's clinical education program was critical in her decision to attend. Now in her third year, Cisneros is involved in the school's death penalty clinic, primarily interviewing witnesses and plowing through court records.

Cisneros belongs to the new crop of savvy students who know that they want more from their legal education — and Bay Area law deans are responding to the call. Stanford Law School, under the stewardship of Dean Larry Kramer, announced late last year his intent to dedicate serious resources to revitalize its clinical program.

Hastings College of the Law has been seeing slow and steady growth with the addition of several new clinics in the last year. And Boalt Hall, which

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experienced its biggest growth spurt in the late 1990s, has been bolstering clinical faculty with six full-time and one part-time hire.

Ty Alper, the associate director of the death penalty clinic at Boalt, said that the variety of practical experience on offer often determines where students will attend. "More and more schools are offering them because in general, clinics attract good students," he said.

It's not just student pressure that's driving clinical development. Clinics have been around for decades, but recently a debate has been growing about the best way to mold law students into effective attorneys. One salvo came last month from The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which issued a report arguing law schools should place less emphasis on intellectual theory and more on practical training.

SIZING STANFORD

Stanford has been hustling to ramp up its programs. The law school had five clinics five years ago, but now offers nine. They include the international human rights program in Ghana, which will send students to a Liberian refugee camp in April, and its criminal defense clinic focusing on Three Strikes cases. A 10th clinic — on counseling non-profits, for students interested in corporate law — is slated to open this fall.

Clinical program director Lawrence Marshall said the school is seeking to raise \$30 million to enhance its endowment to help finance five of the existing clinics.

"It won't cover the entire budget for the clinical program but will be a base for our annual fundraising," he said.

"We want to make up for lost time," Marshall said. "We want to build this into a law school that is a destination for students who are committed to clinical education and public service and we want to hopefully be a model to other law schools."

If clinical enrollment figures can be a guide, the efforts seem to be paying off. When Marshall joined Stanford Law three years ago, the school offered about 100 clinical

openings per year to second- and third-year students. Today, the school offers around 185. According to Marshall, 91 students signed up for a clinical program this academic year, some for more than one. "There were times when the number was more like 20, if you go back 10 years," he said.

BULKING UP BOALT

Deirdre Mulligan, the director of the center for clinical education, said Boalt has ramped up its full time clinical staff. In the fall of 2006, Boalt gave visiting professor Alper a permanent post as associate director of the death penalty clinic. Also at the end of last year, the clinic hired a part-time death penalty investigator. In 2003, the clinic added a full-time paralegal.

Boalt's international human rights clinic brought aboard Roxanna Altholz last fall as full-time associate director to provide hands-on supervision to students. The Samuelson Law, Technology & Public Policy Clinic was bolstered last summer with the addition of two issue experts, a post-doctoral fellow and a social scientist, Mulligan said.

And Hastings College of the Law has been broadening its clinical program menu, with the addition of a state Legislature clinic and another focusing on refugees and human rights. The school plans to add two new fellowship programs next year. "Right now we're pretty much meeting student demand," said Mark Aaronson, a Hastings professor and founder of the college's in-house civil justice clinic.

Back at Boalt, Cisneros said she expects the hands-on skills she picks up will give her an edge in the job hunt.

"You can tell your potential employer: 'I've drafted five legal briefs,' or: 'I've written five memos.' That's so much more substantive," she said. And when she lands that first job, she expects the adjustment to be that much easier. "You don't want to be struggling with the basics, you want to get on with the fun stuff."

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