

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being here. Today, I have a generous amount of time to describe my clinic experience, but I can really summarize my experience in one sentence. Joining the Death Penalty Clinic was the best decision I made in law school. Though I could end my speech here, my time in law school has taught me at least one thing: the importance of showing my work.

So, let's start at the beginning. If anyone had told my elementary school teachers that I would be voluntarily giving a speech in front of more than 100 people, they would have laughed and said, "That doesn't sound like Salena." You see, as a child, I used to compete in Chinese speech competitions. Each year, students from all over southern California would congregate at one high school and recite their poems before a panel of judges. Each year, I would practice and practice, recite and recite. But each year, I would tell my teacher the same thing: "I hope I get second place." To my teacher, this seemed ridiculous. Every child hopes for that tall trophy and the pride that comes with being first. But not me. All I could think about was the fact that first-place winners were required to recite their speech in the high school auditorium, in front of all the other competitors, their families and friends. The mere prospect of this occurring was terrifying.

But over time, my perspective changed.

As a Clinic student these past two years, I have stepped out of my comfort zone more times than I can count, but I have also learned more lessons than I can remember. In Clinic, I had the opportunity to travel to different states and work on creative and complex legal claims. I was able to work with passionate and incredibly talented advocates and investigators in the field. I have knocked on doors, spoken to strangers, and been brusquely ushered off porches. But most importantly, I had the opportunity to work with my client, who turned out to be one of the sweetest and funniest people I have ever met.

Regardless of the time I spent working on Clinic projects, I remember always wishing I could devote more of myself to my client. After all, stepping out of my comfort zone once in a while is a small price to pay in exchange for the satisfaction I feel knowing that every assignment I work on is an active step toward saving his life. Now, I cannot imagine a greater privilege or more rewarding career than one that allows me to represent individuals like him every single day.

But professional and emotional satisfaction are not all that I have gained from the Clinic, and I would like to acknowledge and thank the individuals responsible for my fondest law school memories.

First, I would like to thank the Sax Family, the Prize Committee, and the administrative faculty for continuing such a wonderful Berkeley tradition and for supporting clinical programs, like the Death Penalty Clinic, which have touched the lives of so many. Amy, Olivia, Letitia, and Farrah, thank you for humoring my constant presence in the clinic space.

Lis and Ty, thank you for working so hard each year to make the Clinic a reality. Your work has transformed my law school experience and I can only hope that other students will have the same opportunity I did.

I would like to thank my mom, who flew up from Los Angeles this weekend to be here. Without you, none of this would have been possible. You are my motivation for everything I do.

I would also like to thank my supervising attorney, Katy Miller. Thank you for your endless patience, warmth, and understanding. You have taught me so much these past two years, not just about the law but also about myself, and for that, I will always be grateful. I will also never forget your pithy one-liners. Because of you, I ask myself, “Can I see the forest for the trees?” whenever I begin a new assignment. If I could, I would stay under your wing forever.

Next, I would like to thank Mike Besser. Though the other members of our team graduated last year, you remain. Mike, thank you for being not only an amazing teammate, but also a wonderful friend. I have enjoyed every step of this journey with you, and I wish I could work with you on every assignment.

And last but not least, I would like to thank all of the clinic students and faculty. Even from the briefest of our interactions, I can see how passionate and devoted you each are to your work. The world is a better place because of people like you.

To conclude, I would like to share a quote from a movie clip I saw the other day. In the clip, Sylvester Stallone, as Rocky, tells his son:

The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it.

But he finishes with:

It ain't about how hard you're hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep movin' forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done. **You have to be willing to take the hits.**

When I heard this speech in Rocky's signature drawl, I immediately thought of how my clinic experience has shaped my definition of advocacy. In an inherently unequal system, we will undoubtedly experience setbacks and failures. But, it is not the number of losses we suffer. Rather, it is how we use the skills we gain in clinics to deal with those losses that will define us as advocates. In a system pervaded with injustice, we need true warriors such as you all to keep fighting, to get hit and keep moving forward, to never give up because, in the words of Sylvester Stallone, “That is how winning is done.”