This fall marks the launch of the Elder Law Student Practice Clinic at Brooklyn Law School. The news is timely: As more baby boomers enter the 60+ age bracket, the legal needs of older adults will continue to expand dramatically. By 2030, it is estimated that the borough of Brooklyn alone will have as many as 410,000 residents over the age of 65, according to the Department of City Planning. Yet today, 53 percent of Brooklyn residents in that same demographic struggle with desperately low incomes. To address these pressing needs, Brooklyn Law School has collaborated with Legal Services NYC’s Brooklyn Elderlaw Project and the Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention to create the new clinic.

The clinic is the latest in the Law School’s 30-year history of clinical and externship programs to benefit from close partnerships with community-based organizations—allowing fresh legal minds to polish their craft in the service of some of Brooklyn’s most needy residents. The partner agencies will be responsible for assigning and supervising caseloads while offering a seminar that will provide students with substantive experience in this swiftly growing field, one driven by the numerous aging-related legal crises facing senior citizens.

“...in-depth familiarity and experience with this burgeoning area of law is a wonderful asset for students, especially at a time when students are focused on building skills and making connections that will translate to increased job marketability,” said Deirdre Lok ’03, Assistant Director and General Counsel for the Weinberg Center. Lok will teach the clinic along with Jane Landry-Reyes ’93, Senior Staff Attorney at Legal Services NYC’s Brooklyn program.

The Clinic allows for hands-on work across diverse projects and cases. At LSNC, students will handle eviction cases specific to senior citizens and take on client representation from case intake through strategic case assessment, expert practice, court appearances, and possibly even hearings or trial. This direct client interaction with the older adult population will build invaluable client-interviewing skills and an ability to assess client capacity. Students may also have the opportunity to identify and intervene in cases of elder abuse, and to evaluate other basic food, housing, and health care needs. The process of advocating for an older adult at an administrative hearing offers another invaluable experience for learning.

“The ever-changing laws and regulations surrounding Medicaid benefits, health-care, and insurance makes provides an area ripe for students to position themselves on the cutting edge of a practice that most long-time practicing attorneys are learning as well,” Landry-Reyes said.

In addition, students will work on a project at the Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention, enabling them to advocate for elder abuse victims in Housing, Family, or Supreme Court settings. They may also have the opportunity to work on an advocacy or policy project specific to the older adult population, encompassing attorney-client issues such as ethics, privacy rights, consent to sexual activity, or access to justice.

As true with all BLS clinics, students will attend a weekly seminar that will complement their case and project work by exploring foundational legal concepts and developing necessary skills. Topics will include advance legal planning, older adult benefits, eviction proceedings, and the guardianship process.

Brooklyn Law School has a long and robust history of incorporating service to the public interest in its legal curriculum, said Professor Stacy Caplow, who also serves as Associate Dean for Professional Legal Education. The Elder Rights Clinic will be excellent exposure for any law student interested in public interest law, government, the courts, and agencies, or working as court evaluators, guardians, or in private practice with an older adult or family-oriented client-base. The needs of the elderly encompass the full range of legal tools, and provide an excellent training ground for students.

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