



CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES 2019

USC Gould
School of Law



TWO BROTHERS, REUNITED

Immigration Clinic helps Cameroonian client win asylum

By Anne Bergman

Clinton (left photo, at left) and Gerard Tibuck were reunited thanks to the work of law student Kate Kafka (right) and the USC Gould School's Immigration Clinic.

Clinton and Gerard Tibuck had a lot to celebrate at Thanksgiving this year, as they reunited at Dulles Airport in November after more than three years apart.

The Cameroonian brothers had been separated since 2015, when Gerard fled Cameroon, eventually settling in Maryland after he was briefly detained and released on bail.

Clinton had remained with their family — father, mother and two younger siblings — in Cameroon, where he was a university student. Eventually Clinton was arrested by the police and tortured for peacefully protesting abuses experienced by Cameroon's minority Anglophone community. His father got him released but when the police sought Clinton again, they ended up arresting the father because Clinton had escaped. When his father, who

had lung cancer, died of injuries sustained during his arrest, Clinton knew it was time to flee Cameroon and follow his brother to the United States.

He headed to neighboring Nigeria, where he ended up on a boat to South America. In Panama, Clinton's passport was stolen, but he didn't let that deter him from heading north. When he arrived at the U.S./Mexico border, he presented himself for asylum, received a number on the list of asylum-seeking migrants and ended up at the ICE detention center in Irvine.

Shortly thereafter, in mid-October, 2L law student Kate Kafka took the reins as the lead attorney of Clinton's case, under the supervision of Prof. Jean Reisz, co-director of Gould's Immigration Clinic. It was Kafka's first Immigration Clinic case.

“The first time we met was at his first hearing. I was alone in the courtroom,” Kafka recalls, noting that she felt an affinity for Clinton, as they are the same age and even shared the same college major, English.

“I remember thinking, ‘Is this young lady going to represent me?’” Clinton says with a laugh. “But as soon as she stood up in court, I knew she was going to do it. I only had confidence in her.”

The admiration was mutual, as Kafka recounts how Clinton’s good memory and ability to clearly articulate his story served him well in the courtroom. “He was a great witness, so earnest and respectful. His answers were perfect,” she says.

Before her court appearance, Kafka, who estimates she spent 40 hours a week for three weeks working on Clinton’s case, had researched the tumultuous history of Cameroon in order to present a full picture of the injustices and patterns of abuse to the judge. “It lends credibility to an asylum case when the first-hand narrative fits with current events in the country,” Kafka says. “He’s lucky he got out when he did.”

Reisz and Prof. Niels Frenzen, with whom she co-directs the Immigration Clinic, were with Kafka every step of the way.

“Because Clinton was detained, Kate had to work with tight litigation deadlines and did so with impressive professionalism,” says Reisz. “After a particularly stressful filing, Kate surprised me by saying that she now knew she wanted to do litigation. Kate was especially prepared and competent and conducted the entire hearing on her own and better than most immigration attorneys.”

Throughout, Kafka kept in touch with Clinton’s brother Gerard, who was nervous about his own case getting denied for fear of how it could negatively impact Clinton’s case. “Gerard called me right after he won asylum,” Kafka says.

All that was left was to wait for the outcome of Clinton’s case. “Before we got the decision I was so nervous. I didn’t sleep,” says Kafka. “I was so worried about what would happen to him if we didn’t win. I could see that being in the detention center was weighing on him.”

“When the judge said I was granted asylum, I couldn’t believe it,” Clinton admits.

“When I called Gerard right after we won asylum for Clinton, he cried and yelped,” Kafka says. “You could tell

“When I called Gerard right after we won asylum for Clinton, he cried and yelped. You could tell he was dancing around the room. Even I got emotional. It was the best experience of my life.”

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Clinton was released later that night. Volunteers from Friends of Orange County Detainees (FOCD) provided Clinton with a place to stay, and through connections with the Orange County airport, got him on a flight to Dulles to reunite with his brother. “Because the FOCD had a connection with the airport, they were able to get him on a flight. Otherwise he would have had to take a bus across the country,” Kafka explains.

For Kafka, winning her first case gave her a boost of confidence. She’ll be working for a big law firm in San Francisco this summer and wants to continue doing pro bono immigration work. “Coming to law school was always about helping people,” she says. “To know that I made a tangible difference in someone’s life really locked me in and convinced me that I’d made the right choice.”

Meanwhile, Clinton is living with Gerard and adjusting to Maryland weather and work as a landscaper. He acknowledges softly that “everything’s good,” but admits to being troubled by thoughts of his mother and two younger siblings who remain in Cameroon.

Yet he allows himself aspirations. “I want to be a lawyer. But I want to practice criminal law, not immigration law,” Clinton says with a laugh. 🍷



THE LEGAL RULES OF THE GAME

USC Cinematic Arts student game developer gains creative stimulation from Intellectual Property and Technology Law Clinic

By Carren Jao

Imagine being able to travel in time to see how choices you made about the environment have impacted your world. That's the idea behind "Plasticity," a video game dreamed up by a USC Cinematic Arts student and currently under development by a multi-school team. With branded single-use plastics as the game's focus, intellectual property issues are a key part of its development. Enter the USC Gould School of Law's Intellectual Property and Technology Law Clinic (IPTLC).

While Interactive Media and Games Division student Aimee Zhang (2019) works to finish the game along with a 32-person team of students from various USC schools and Art Center College of Design, IPTLC participants Christine Cheung (JD 2020) and Austin Stenberg (JD 2019) are helping Zhang navigate the complex world of intellectual property rights.

"They've really given me more confidence in how copyright and fair use operate, especially within the context of a video game," says Zhang.

The USC Gould School of Law's Intellectual Property and Technology Law Clinic, directed by Prof. Jef Pearlman, gives 2L and 3L students two semesters of real-world experience preparing them for their legal profession after graduation. Participating students tackle most everything, from drafting contracts to advising award-winning filmmakers, game designers and entrepreneurs, among others.

Participating in the law clinic is a win for Zhang, but also for Stenberg and Cheung, who will walk away with valuable experience relevant to their careers.

"Projects like this give our law students and students from other schools something they're unlikely to find in their other classes — the real-world experience of lawyers and clients working together toward a common goal."

"While a bit of a generalization, a lot of the legal positions that law students hold during their first- or second-year summers are less hands on," Stenberg says. "Oftentimes, law students are relegated to a more behind-the-scenes role, with the practicing attorneys understandably engaging in more face time with the clients. The frequent one-on-one communication that we have with clients is an incredible opportunity to develop our client relations and rapport-building skills, a special opportunity that most law students never get to have."



From left: Game developer and USC Cinematic Arts student Aimee Zhang with IPTLC Director Prof. Jef Pearlman and IPTLC participants Austin Stenberg and Christine Cheung

Zhang came up with the game's concept with fellow student Michelle Olson (2020) in January 2018. It places players in the year 2140 in a world overrun with plastic, leaving lifeless cities, flooded towns and widespread debris. "Our goal is to create a game that encourages others to be more sustainable," says Zhang. "We want players to say, 'I feel empowered to make a change. I feel introspective and reflective about my personal relationship to plastic. I made a mistake, but I can fix it.'" In the game, players are tasked with solving puzzles by creating solutions. Players then return to the same area 10 years later to see the impact of their choices.

Zhang says working with the law students in the clinic has improved her game. Because of the game's focus on single-use plastics, she needed to be really careful about how objects within the game appear — the shape, color, design and branding of packaging — but now she has gained the confidence to actually leave things in.

"Initially when I didn't have access to legal expertise, I self-censored content out of fear of facing a lawsuit or legal trouble," says Zhang, who aims to release the game by June. "Now I feel I have a better understanding of what my limits are, of what I can and cannot do."

Pearlman noted the value of this project not only for law students, but other schools at USC.

"Projects like this give our law students and students from other schools something they're unlikely to find in their other classes — the real-world experience of lawyers and clients working together toward a common goal," he says. "Our partnerships with the USC School of Cinematic Arts and its Interactive Media and Games Division are examples of the types of representation we do, inside and outside the school, giving our students hands-on opportunities to tackle challenges they'll face in their careers." 🚧



‘NO’ TO LAUTENBERG

Thanks in part to four hard-working IHRC students, an unprecedented blanket rejection of 87 Iranian refugees is overturned on summary judgment

By Diane Krieger

Last year, Behrouz G. was a man without a country. He couldn't come to the United States. He couldn't stay in Austria. And he couldn't go back to Iran.

Targeted for his Christian faith, the Iranian shopkeeper had been repeatedly intimidated by government agents who would barge into his establishment, destroy religious symbols and serve him with trumped-up citations. As the harassment escalated, Behrouz entered the Lautenberg-Specter program aimed at religious-minority resettlement in the United States.

It isn't every day students bring an expedited class action lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security — let alone prevail.

"This work came about because we were in Beirut," notes Prof. Hannah Garry, director of the USC Gould International Human Rights Clinic.

Had she and her students not been on the ground with the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) when the Lautenberg mass denials came down, they wouldn't have been asked to join the legal fight.

The nine-day IHRC field experience that took them to Beirut was a pilot project that Garry means to repeat every spring semester going forward. Her goal: to expose students to major refugee intake centers in host countries like Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Greece and Uganda. Funded by alumnus Barry McCabe (JD 1977), the trips will give USC Gould students the chance to interview and provide legal aid to people in desperate need.

"It's an important focus of the clinic to bring students to those places and provide critical legal representation," Garry says.

Behrouz had every reason to be optimistic: In recent years, Lautenberg applicants enjoyed near-100-percent success in qualifying for refugee status, said Prof. Hannah Garry, who recently led a team of law students participating in Gould's International Human Rights Clinic to advocate for him in federal court.

Earlier, Behrouz had obtained a special visa and traveled to Vienna, where his claim was to be processed. (The Lautenberg-Specter program is run in partnership with the Austrian government.) But months passed, and he didn't get the go-ahead. Then one day last spring, he received a "notice of ineligibility" from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

No explanation was offered. His claim had been "denied as a matter of discretion."

LIVING IN LIMBO

Requests for clarification went unanswered, but Behrouz learned through his contacts within the New York-based International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) that all 87 Iranians in his cohort had received the same notice.

Such a mass denial was unprecedented, according to the *LA Times*, and placed the Lautenberg applicants in a precarious position: all faced imminent deportation to Iran, where they could expect even greater persecution as declared asylum seekers.

DHS's opaque language blocked legal recourse.

"If you don't know why you're being denied, you can't appeal the decision," says 3L USC law student Ashley De Vance (JD 2019).

SKYPING FROM BEIRUT TO VIENNA

De Vance was one of four USC Gould IHRC students who sprang into action on behalf of the Lautenberg applicants. She and classmates Matt Saria (JD 2019), Bettina Tiangco (JD 2019) and Natalia DaSilva (JD 2019) were all in Beirut on a nine-day field experience (see info box) at the time. They were interviewing Syrian refugees seeking UN resettlement when their host agency, IRAP, got wind of the Lautenberg mass denials. Behrouz's case was assigned to the USC team; the next day they conducted an hours-long interview with him from Beirut via Skype. Back in Los Angeles, De Vance and Saria raced to help IRAP bring

MASS DENIALS

Law students Ashley De Vance and Matt Saria in Beirut with the International Human Rights Clinic

motions for class certification and summary judgment in U.S. District Court, funneling legal research to the pro-bono litigation team at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher.

The outcome was a big win.

In May, Judge Beth Labson Freeman in the Northern District of California granted class certification for all 87 denied Iranian refugees. In July, she ordered DHS to immediately re-open each Lautenberg case and fully explain any future denials.

“I am so proud of the students’ hard work and zealous advocacy,” says Garry, who launched the IHRC in 2010. “This is a huge victory.”

USC Gould alumnus Barry McCabe (JD 1977) is equally proud of the IHRC students and supports the clinic’s efforts. “It’s very important to look at the humanitarian side of the law,” he says. “This project is helping refugees and providing law students with a real-world learning experience. I think this is an extremely worthwhile effort. I know our law students will be enriched by their experience with the refugees, and that is very rewarding for me.”

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES

Saria and De Vance say their experiences through IHRC have ignited a passion for human rights law.

“That year gave me such exposure to all the ways you can work in that space,” Saria says. “You don’t need to be a full-time human rights lawyer to do it.”

His primary area of practice, when he joins the Los Angeles office of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher next summer, will be real estate law, with emphasis on land use.

De Vance will join the Los Angeles offices of Alston & Bird when she graduates. With certificates in international law and business law, she’ll start in the firm’s business litigation branch.



But thanks to Garry’s rigorous training and close ties to the human rights community, Saria and De Vance have the tools to make lifelong contributions in refugee advocacy — which, Garry emphasizes, is critically important at this moment.

‘HAVING A LAWYER IS EVERYTHING’

“We’ve got the largest refugee crisis in world history,” Garry says. “There are literally millions of people with no advocate. And having a lawyer is everything. Studies show asylum seekers who have representation are so much more successful at getting protection from persecution than those who don’t. We need as many lawyers as we can get.”

For De Vance, the Lautenberg victory feels bittersweet.

“It was really exciting, but also really sad,” De Vance says. “This is a drop in the bucket. Yes, the mass denials were overturned, but refugees are being denied every day. There’s so much more work that needs to be done.”

Behrouz’s case is still pending. He remains in Vienna. 🚩



FOR MAXIMUM SECURITY INMATES, USC'S POST-CONVICTION JUSTICE PROJECT SPARKS HOPE

By Gilien Silsby

The inmates at the maximum-security Pelican Bay State Prison in Northern California sat in a circle in the enormous gym, their hair graying at the temples and a decades-old refrain echoing through their heads: No optimism. No chance to go home. Most had been incarcerated for more than half their lives, sentenced to die in prison for crimes committed as juveniles or young adults.

But on a day last month, the men thought about second chances. They listened and took notes as a group of people dedicated to reforming the juvenile justice system spoke to them about the difficult path to release through parole.

Made up of USC law students, formerly incarcerated advocates and three human rights and legal professionals, the team was there to educate the prisoners about new laws that could lead to their freedom.

"We are really excited to meet you today, and to help you get home," said Prof. Heidi Rummel, director of the USC Gould School of Law's Post-Conviction Justice Project (PCJP), which has co-sponsored or written nearly every juvenile justice bill in California since 2012. "We are going to help you with the parole process because it can be a steep hill to climb," Rummel, a former federal prosecutor, told the men. "The goal is to show the board who you are now. You need to search within yourself to find your story."

The men's once-stoic expressions turned to smiles and optimism. Even though some of the men aren't eligible for parole for 10 or 15 years, they can now dream of freedom.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OPTIMISM

Rummel and her Post-Conviction Justice Project students have made it their mission to hold parole workshops at every prison in California that houses juvenile offenders sentenced to life without parole.

They have teamed up with Elizabeth Calvin, senior advocate at Human Rights Watch, who teaches with Rummel at USC Gould.

So far, they have visited 19 prisons in the past year, holding workshops and offering counsel to 211 of the state's 257 juvenile offenders originally sentenced to life without parole (LWOP). On the Pelican Bay prison visit, they were joined by Scott Budnick, producer of *The Hangover* franchise and founder of the nonprofit Anti-Recidivism Coalition, which employs former youth offenders in Hollywood and elsewhere.

USC Gould and Human Rights Watch began their prison workshops after writing a slew of juvenile justice bills, including the recently passed California SB 394, which gives juveniles sentenced to life without parole a meaningful opportunity for release through the youth offender parole process.

Calvin bestowed on each of the men a piece of paper with a first-time-ever parole eligibility date — something that had not existed before SB 394 took effect in 2018. "On Dec. 31, 2017, the system showed LWOP after your name," Calvin said. "Now there is a date. This is significant. This is your future."

Many juvenile LWOP prisoners are not prepared for parole-board hearings because they had no hope of release and very few opportunities for rehabilitative programming. By offering the workshops and one-on-one legal sessions with the law students, Rummel and her team hope to fill the gap.

There to support them in their efforts were former juvenile LWOP clients, who have been released through the parole process. They shared their stories and offered advice. "You have got to be authentic and real," said Jawad James, who was resentenced and paroled in July. "The board can see through lies and manipulation. You need to dig deep inside yourself and explain how you have reformed."



The USC Gould School's Post-Conviction Justice Project has been holding parole workshops at all California prisons that house juvenile offenders sentenced to life without parole.
(PHOTO BY BRIAN FRANK)

COUNSELING FROM EXPERIENCE

The next day, the team gathered for a second Pelican Bay workshop with men sentenced to more than 50 years for crimes they committed as young adults. A presentation from a 3L USC law student moved some inmates to tears. Kyla* told the crowd that she believes in second chances. But she also warned the men not to expect forgiveness from their victims.

Kyla should know. In 2007, her brother was murdered in an abandoned house after selling marijuana. "You can hear the shake in my voice because it still hurts," she said. "Now I fight for people who committed crimes very similar to the crime that killed my brother. It's important to understand the victim."

She then told the second part of her story. "During my first year of law school, my 17-year-old sister committed a crime identical to the crime that killed my brother. She is now serving 20 years in prison. So I've been on both sides."

She encouraged the men to keep working on themselves and prepare for their hearings. "Even though I've lived with the pain, I believe in second chances. Don't think all victims feel the same way about

you. I believe in all of you. If you do the work and make a change, you deserve to go home."

When she finished speaking, every man in the room rose for a standing ovation.

"It's really brave of her to share her story," said Rummel, who has co-directed USC Gould's PCJP for the past decade. "I am repeatedly inspired by my students and the men we are helping."

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING LIVES

After a full weekend of workshops that included small and large groups, as well as visits to men in solitary confinement, the law students met privately with inmates to provide legal advice about the parole process. Whether their hearing is in two months or two decades away, getting ready for parole is an important challenge, said Rummel.

Rummel and the students outlined a step-by-step explanation of the parole hearing, including three main questions that will be asked: What did you do? Why did you do it? How have you changed?

"The questions are simple, but the answers are difficult," Rummel told the prisoners. "And your answer to the change question must reflect real change. We know that many of you have had little access to rehabilitative programs or positive influences as LWOP inmates. But times are changing, and it is up to you to dig in and do the work."

If the Pelican Bay visit by Rummel and her team opened the door to a future for dozens of men, then participation in the Post-Conviction Justice Project also motivated the students as they look ahead.

"The project has given me an opportunity to meet many inspiring individuals who have maintained hope when it seemed impossible," said Peraya Siriwong, a 3L USC law student. "Going into some of the darkest prisons and finding bright spirits has been an incredibly meaningful part of my law school experience, and it has motivated me to continue to pursue this kind of work."

After visiting a client in solitary confinement and advising several others, third-year law student Maggie Mendez was ready to return to her law school classes. She said goodbye to the clients, hoping she had provided some spark of hope. "I truly feel honored to be part of PCJP and to work with the clients," said Mendez, who is planning to be a public defender after graduating in May. "Our work is providing real change and hope for these individuals." 🗡️

**Last name not included for purposes of privacy*



TEAMWORK, TRUST AND PERSONAL DISPUTES

In a collaboration with the LAFD, the Mediation Clinic helps resolve conflicts between firefighters

By Christina Schweighofer

From left: Jim Sullivan (MDR 2018), Maureen Maloney (LLM in ADR 2018) Fire Battalion Chief Linda Cessor and Alex Vazquez-Sherman of the Los Angeles Fire Department

Looking to address personal conflicts in the workforce without disciplinary action, the Los Angeles Fire Department in 2016 turned to USC Gould's Mediation Clinic.

"Mediation is a trend nationwide," says Cynthia Hernandez (JD 2000), chief special investigator at the LAFD Professional Standards Division, a civilian role in the department. "We want to resolve issues with members, especially if they work in the same office or station, and try to repair the relationship. That's where USC comes in, to help disputing parties come to some resolution."

The timing was ideal, since Gould was just getting ready to greet its inaugural class of students in the Judge Judith O. Hollinger Program in Alternative Dispute Resolution. With the collaboration now well underway,

the USC mediators and the representatives of the Fire Department agree on its efficacy.

They are also aware of the singular character of mediations within fire departments, where the often dangerous, stressful nature of the work and shared living quarters make it crucial that people work together well. "Teamwork and trust are essential for success," says Battalion Chief Linda Cessor, who ran the program before Hernandez. She adds that firefighters "will always put their personal feelings aside to ensure the safety of the citizens they serve." With the mediation program, firefighters now have "an avenue to address their own well-being in addition to meeting the high demands of the job."

USC Gould graduates Maureen Maloney (LLM in ADR 2018) and Jim Sullivan (MDR 2018) recently helped resolve two LAFD conflicts for the Mediation Clinic.

Maloney credits a pre-mediation briefing by Cessor and Fire Special Investigator Alexandra Vazquez-Sherman on the organizational structure of the LAFD with helping her resolve a dispute between two female firefighters.

Comparing her LAFD experience with previous small claims mediations, she spoke of “a very different dynamic.”

“This clearly isn’t about money,” Maloney says. “It’s about repairing or even restoring a relationship. Because in many cases firefighters not only work

facilitating between them. “Every mediation has given me something of value,” Sullivan says, “things I have taken into my personal and professional life.”

According to Cessor, the LAFD explored “a number of options” before settling on USC Gould for a mediation collaboration. “It was determined that the law school’s Mediation Clinic could provide a professional, collaborative and beneficial relationship with the LAFD,” she says. Cessor and Vazquez-Sherman report that the LAFD mediations conducted so far “have received extremely positive

“We want to resolve issues with members, especially if they work in the same office or station, and try to repair the relationship. That’s where USC comes in, to help disputing parties come to some resolution.”

together, they live together.” She expects the mediations to create a ripple effect where the larger organization benefits as much as the participants.

Sullivan recalls that one of his LAFD mediations — involving two male firefighters of similar tenure but very different rank — allowed both parties to be candid about their experience of the dividing issue. What he saw was “two guys, both close to 60, opening up in a way that men of that generation and in that line of work just don’t do.”

With Sullivan’s support, the two parties settled the dispute and even reconciled. Sullivan attributes the expediency of the process to a few factors. The mediation was voluntary and confidential, and each party entered it, as Sullivan says, “already committed to settling so they could put the dispute behind them and get back to being firefighters.”

Maloney and Sullivan — she is a licensed attorney and business consultant to financial service firms, he a commercial real estate broker transitioning into mediation services — agree that mediations are life-changing not just for the parties but also for the person

feedback regarding the expertise and professionalism of the mediators.”

Hernandez calls the program “amazing,” crediting Assistant Chief Stephen Gutierrez, commander of the Division of Professional Standards, with ensuring that the department reaches out to members and continues to identify cases that qualify for mediation.

Professor Lisa Klerman, the director of USC Gould’s Mediation Clinic, is excited about partnering with the LAFD to help resolve their workplace disputes. “Our Advanced Mediation Clinic at USC has developed an expertise in resolving employment disputes and has a robust caseload that it handles with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, so the LAFD program is a natural fit,” she says. 📌

To learn more about USC Gould’s Judge Judith O. Hollinger Program in Alternative Dispute Resolution, email us at adr@law.usc.edu or sign up to receive program news.



MEET THE LAWYER-TURNED-PROFESSOR BEHIND GOULD'S SMALL BUSINESS CLINIC

Prof. Michael Chasalow and the SBC have helped nearly 3,000 clients

By Joanna Clay

In law school, classwork is largely theoretical, which students will apply when they graduate and go off to a firm.

But Prof. Michael Chasalow thought, what if you could approach teaching the other way around? Take real-world experiences and make them an academic exercise?

That's what led him to start USC Gould's Small Business Clinic a decade ago. It's a competitive year-long program. Only a couple students get in a semester, and although he oversees it as the practicing attorney on each case, students really lead the charge — each assigned to clients who likely couldn't afford legal help otherwise.

For the most part, it's helping small businesses start — such as creating an LLC — and protecting founders from personal liability. The clinic has launched a vegan ice cream company and helped two beekeepers partner up — including combining their bees.

Chasalow, who cut his teeth in big firms, was happiest working with small businesses, counseling investors working with start-ups from roughly 1999 to 2008. On top of his Juris Doctor degree, he also has an MBA.

"It's really hard to be with people who are starting a business and not be caught up in the enthusiasm," he says.

"There's so much possibility and so much excitement. People just find it incredibly rewarding."

A SAFE PLACE TO LEARN

Since its inception, the clinic has helped nearly 3,000 clients — most of whom would not be able to afford the services of a law firm — receive free services valued at up to \$25,000. Roughly half its clients are women and people of color.

They handle every facet of a client's project — explaining paperwork and legal implications to meeting deadlines, Chasalow says. He's there for feedback and guidance.

It feels like a safe place to learn, students say. Graduating and jumping into a big firm — where one mistake could cost your job — can be dizzying for some students. In the clinic, Chasalow trains students to be detail-oriented and to respond to crises directly.

"I always say to people: It's not about whether or not you mess up; it's what you do about what you messed up," he says. "It's a really hard thing to learn."

And he's honest. He might tell a clinic participant, "Look, if you were on the job, you'd be getting yelled at."

Lauren Stadler (JD 2011), who practices at a public real estate company in L.A., said the ability to learn by doing in the clinic was huge.

"It mentally prepared me, and it also made me more confident in what I was doing," says Stadler, whose clients included a Downtown L.A. peanut brittle maker and a life coach. "A lot of people entering their first job haven't had any experience doing any of the work they'd be doing every single day of their careers."

Shortly after Gould, Stadler was reminded of her time at the clinic during a trip to Napa. She was in a Dean & DeLuca, the gourmet grocer, when there it was — her client’s artisanal peanut brittle.

Eight years later, she still calls Chasalow for advice, whether it’s asking him what it’s like to go in-house or getting tips on juggling motherhood with her career. Chasalow has triplets. She and her husband recently met with him for drinks.

Wenger, is also a USC student. She’s seen Chasalow step in to offer his expertise, like when he reached out to colleagues who were well-versed in tax regulations to address her concerns.

“He totally goes above and beyond his job description,” Wenger said.

For Chasalow, teaching became his calling sort of unexpectedly. He taught his first classes roughly 20 years ago, first at Whittier Law School and then at USC.

“It’s really hard to be with people who are starting a business and not be caught up in the enthusiasm. There’s so much possibility and so much excitement. People just find it incredibly rewarding.”

Small business owner (and USC student) Erica Wenger, left, works with Gould student Katy Neubauer through the Small Business Clinic. Wenger’s company, Mahkana, helps nonprofits raise money by selling specialty beaded bracelets. (USC PHOTO/GUS RUELAS)

“He cares for his students, not just on a professional level, but as people,” she says. “He tries to be there for you in all aspects of your life.”

Although many of his students, like Stadler, go on to work with corporations or firms, those experiences with small businesses or “mom and pops” come in handy. For example, that student who helped the beekeeper went on to work with a company that deals in agricultural products.

“She called me up and said, ‘I worked on a bee acquisition.’ Of course it was millions of dollars, but she said, ‘I was the only one who had bee experience,’” Chasalow says.

GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

The clinic, and the chance to do hands-on legal work and impact the community, has been a big draw to prospective law students. It was meeting Chasalow during a USC visit, and hearing about his clinic, that solidified Katy Neubauer’s (JD 2019) decision to study at Gould.

She’s now counseling Mahkana, a bracelet company that raises money for nonprofits. It’s already leading in the cause-marketing space. The founder, Erica



“My wife started pointing out when I wasn’t teaching, I wasn’t as happy,” he said. “Being able to explain things more clearly to students is a really rewarding activity for me — that I’m making what’s foggy a little bit clearer.

“Maybe that’s a simple career goal but that feels really good to me.” 🍷

This article originally appeared on USC News.

HOME SWEET CLINIC HOME

USC Gould’s law clinics found a new home this year in Verna and Peter Dauterive Hall — giving students, alumni, faculty and staff a first look at the clinics’ brand new space and a chance to reflect on the work they have been doing. Dean Andrew Guzman praised the space as “a functional, modern and comfortable space for our clinics to operate.” Clinical faculty directors then joined him for a ceremonial ribbon cutting. “I think I speak for all when I say that we look forward to the great work that will continue to come from our law clinics,” the Dean said.

