Columbia Launches Innovative Course to Improve Clinical Practice

Columbia has joined forces with the law schools of New York and Fordham universities to create an innovative course in which law and social work students and faculty are developing an organization to improve the representation of parents in Family Court. The organization – the Center for Family Representation (CFR) – will assist solo practitioners assigned to represent parents in gaining access the same range of legal and social work services that lawyers working in public interest organizations such as the Legal Aid Society receive. CFR will also serve as a policy and law reform voice for parents and their counsel.

"CFR really grew out of a lot of people within the Family Court community recognizing that the system for representing parents was really broken," Professor Jane Spinak (above) told the New York Law Journal. "Without parents having adequate representation, the child welfare system and the Family Court are not going to work very well."

Prof. Spinak, the Law School’s director of clinical programs, is serving as the chair of the board of CFR. Professors from Fordham and NYU law schools also serve on CFR’s board. (Among them is NYU Professor Madeleine Kurtz ’84 who was a student in the child advocacy clinic while at Columbia.) Five joint classes were held during the fall semester along with seminars held at the individual schools. Students have begun projects that are helping CFR to disseminate information, develop a policy agenda, and improve parents’ experiences in Family Court.

Columbia law students have been investigating the effectiveness of translation services during child welfare investigations and court proceedings while Columbia social work students have been analyzing parent training requirements. The students have already been asked to present their findings to the New York City Child Welfare Advisory Panel.

Columbia Law Professors To Examine War in Speaker Series

Six Law School professors will examine issues relating to war and peace – including the war on terrorism and potential conflict with Iraq – during the spring semester’s Public International Law: Bridging Theory and Practice speaker series. The professors and their topics are as follows: Richard Gardner: "The Legality of Preemptive Force"; Oscar Schachter ’39: "Use of Force Under the U.N. Charter"; George Fletcher: "Criminal Accountability for War Crimes"; Lori Damrosch: "When Democracies Turn to War"; Gerald Neuman: "Should the Laws of War Protect Terrorists?" and José E. Alvarez: "The U.N.’s War on Terrorism." The speaker series, inaugurated in the fall of 1999, promotes robust exchanges on issues of common concern.

Law School Launches "Columbia Law Survey"

Columbia Law School has initiated a series of surveys about the legal profession that, it is hoped, will enlarge the audience for the faculty’s expertise on pressing legal issues. The surveys were done in partnership with Professor Michael Dorf, who examined the results in his regular column on Findlaw.com.

In three separate polls, a representative sample of the national population was asked for evaluations on the following topics:

- **Lawyers and the legal profession** – almost two-thirds of Americans think lawyers are overpaid and about half think attorneys do more harm than good;
- **Knowledge of the U.S. Constitution** – most Americans believe that if Roe v. Wade were overturned, abortion would become illegal throughout the United States;
- **Impressions about the evolving issue of corporate responsibility** – a majority of Americans (52 percent) say the new law increasing penalties for corporate corruption and accounting fraud will not solve the problems plaguing Wall Street.

The survey results were carried by various news media, including the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, and the Boston Herald. The Law School is exploring additional avenues for future surveys. Complete results of the surveys can be found at http://www.law.columbia.edu/.