



Clinical Legal Education

A range of service learning modules are available at NUI Galway whereby students undertake accredited activity of specific relevance to their chosen subject for the benefit of the community

Teaching Context

Subject	Bachelor of Civil Law
Department	Faculty of Law
Participants	Final Year Bachelor of Civil Law Students
Pedagogy	Community Based Learning
Method	Work placements in which students put their analytical, research and writing skills developed in the classroom to use in the “real world.”
Participants	15 - 20 students.
Hours	100+ hours in the community and 10 seminar hours
Credits	6 ECTS
Materials	Materials are provided by each placement and depend on the nature of the particular placement. Many of these documents fall within the rubric of the lawyer-client privilege.
Assessment	Completion of reflective essay; Participation in interactive seminars; Satisfactory evaluation form from placement supervisor.
Length	10 weeks
Community Partners	Equality Authority (Legal Advisor); Rape Crisis Network Ireland (Legal Advisor); National Federation of Voluntary Bodies; Various national and international non-governmental organisations; Legal practitioners throughout Ireland.
Optional/Mandatory	Optional
First Piloted	2007

Introduction

NUI Galway is a pioneering institution in the implementation of service learning programmes across all faculties. Service learning seeks to reinvigorate the civic mission of higher education and instil in students a sense of social responsibility and civic awareness. It is a pedagogical tool that encourages students to learn and explore issues vital to society inside and outside the classroom. Students learn from engaging with communities by active participation.

Clinical Legal Education

In an effort to integrate students into the community and to advance their knowledge in their field of study, the Faculty of Law has embarked on a commitment to Service Learning under the banner of Clinical Legal Education. Through an innovative approach to legal training, the faculty seeks to complement the theoretical training students receive in the classroom with practical, hands-on experience in “real world” placements for which they receive academic credit.

The programme allows final year Bachelor of Civil Law students to offer *pro bono* work to government bodies, non-governmental organisations and practicing lawyers in order to gain experience.

Academic Basis

The part-time, ten week placements are scheduled in the second semester of the final year. Based on an advanced programme, the placement incorporates an orientation, work experience, a reflective essay and a final seminar, which many members of the Faculty of Law also attend.

Assessment

Assessments are based on students’ final reflective essays, the evaluation forms completed by their supervisors and their participation in interactive seminars.

Student Benefit

The service learning module gives students practical experience which is instrumental to their personal and professional formation. Students also have the opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of the acute difficulties encountered by both groups and individuals in Irish society and, in their future professional lives, can endeavour to promote law reform in the name of those at the margins.

From a career point of view, the law students graduate with a marketable experience which enhances their CV and job knowledge. The practical skills developed during the programme are essential for careers in the field of law.

Community Benefit

The primary goal is to give students practical experience and, to the extent possible, to use their specialised skill sets to benefit the marginalised in Irish society.

Through the strong network of contacts that NUI Galway staff members have with legal practitioners and in the NGO sector, students in the final year of the Bachelor of Civil Law degree are placed in, *inter alia*, the Equality Authority, the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, Rape Crisis Network Ireland and with practitioners throughout the country.

The students' work can be of great benefit in a society where legal costs are often prohibitive.

Academic Comment

Lawrence Donnelly of NUI Galway's Faculty of Law is Ireland's first permanent Lecturer in Clinical Legal Education. Clinical Legal Education is the embodiment of the recognition that there are limits to what students can learn in the classroom and that, as such, the integration of practical training in their legal education is vital. Through his extensive involvement with students both in the classroom and beyond, he seeks to ensure that students develop the analytical, research and writing skills necessary to become competent legal professionals.

With service learning practices in Clinical Legal Education already implemented in Continental Europe, as well as in the United States, Mr. Donnelly thought it was important to begin implementing them here. "This type of learning – learning by doing – is something of a pedagogical departure from the traditional delivery of legal education in Irish universities and has fortunately been embraced by NUI Galway. The impressive feedback from both students and employers on the first year of the placement programme justifies the university's commitment to our Faculty's endeavour and holds great promise for the future."