

ASU Law clinics serve the state's most vulnerable populations

Free and low-cost clinics provide legal assistance to the community

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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Most people will need some sort of legal support at least once in their lifetime, but knowing where to get it — and having it be affordable — is a barrier to many.

Arizona State University's [Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law](#) has 10 free or low-cost on-campus clinics that serve the community — and in many cases the state's most vulnerable populations.

"Our students help inventors get patents, provide small businesses with legal startup services, write wills for the members of the Native American community, protect people's First Amendment rights and work on claims of wrongful convictions, just to name a few," said [Art Hinshaw](#), associate dean for experiential learning at ASU Law. "Across our clinics, students give thousands of hours of quality legal services to the community at little or no cost."

In the 2023–24 academic year alone, the clinics served more than 400 clients, and clinical program students logged more than 2,000 hours of work, with roughly one-third to half of those hours spent providing direct services to individuals or organizations.

The [Civil Litigation Clinic](#) was the first one to open at the law school in the late 1960s, and services have expanded to include everything from an [Immigration Clinic](#) to a [Prosecution Clinic](#).

Here's a closer look at some of them.

Civil litigations

The Civil Litigation Clinic helps low-income individuals who might have nowhere else to turn when faced with legal problems. Whether they are grappling with consumer fraud, employment discrimination, unemployment insurance benefits, wage claims disputes or tenant's rights, the clinic can help.

The clinic is a one-semester course where student attorneys are trained to become effective, compassionate practitioners through classroom instruction, individual mentoring and by directly representing clients.

Under the supervision of experienced attorneys, the students are involved in all aspects of civil and administrative practice, including interviewing and counseling clients, fact investigation, drafting pleadings, motions, taking depositions and sometimes representing clients in trials, arbitrations and mediation.

Wrongful convictions

Post-conviction advocacy has gained prominence in recent years for its efforts to undo what the National Institute of Justice says is "one of the greatest tragedies in the criminal justice system — the conviction of a person for a crime he or she did not commit."

According to the National Registry of Exonerations, there have been 3,689 exonerations since 1989, with those exonerated having lost more than 33,980 years of their lives.

ASU Law's [Post-Conviction Clinic](#) investigates claims of wrongful conviction and [manifest injustice](#) in Arizona's criminal justice system. In partnership with the [Arizona Justice Project](#), the clinic reviews cases from incarcerated individuals who claim to be wrongly convicted.

Many of these convictions are related to Proposition 107, which passed in 2020 and legalized recreational marijuana in Arizona while also including a provision to expunge certain marijuana-related offenses from criminal records. Since the law passed, the clinic has helped dozens of individuals clear their records and the way for a new life.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses

The [Entrepreneurship and Small Business Clinic](#) gives entrepreneurs, startups, inventors and small business owners the legal support they need — from helping set up a business properly to reviewing contracts and protecting ideas.

Clients work in small teams that help early-stage companies choose the right legal structure, review commercial leases, understand intellectual property or employment law, and more.

Additionally, the [Lisa Foundation Patent Law Clinic](#) assists clients with patent applications and intellectual property issues, and the [Innovation Advancement Program](#) supports entrepreneurs and startups with legal services related to business formation and intellectual property.

Native issues

The Indian Legal Clinic represents Native Americans from the state's 22 tribes, and Alaska. It assists with various legal matters across tribal, state and federal courts. That could mean anything from representing someone in a tribal dispute to handling cases that involve both tribal and outside legal systems.

The clinic routinely handles criminal matters in tribal courts and assists in tribal legal development projects — such as code drafting for tribal governments — and court rule drafting for tribal courts.

Additionally, the clinic frequently represents individual tribal members in civil actions and devotes significant attention to federal policy issues affecting tribes, such as federal recognition and voting rights.

Mediation

Paying to address a legal matter in court can be extremely costly; mediation offers a voluntary option for people who want to avoid both the risks and costs of going to court.

[The Lodestar Mediation Clinic](#) provides clients with a neutral mediator that helps guide participating parties in civil cases toward a mutually beneficial solution.

The clinic is an integral component of ASU's nationally recognized [Lodestar Dispute Resolution Center](#). Most of the clients that seek help at the center have filed claims in the Maricopa County Justice Courts or with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

"Mediation is valuable because it empowers parties to control the solutions to the legal and nonlegal problems that people experience," said Hinshaw, who is also the director of the Lodestar Dispute Resolution Center. "People have more satisfaction with outcomes and comply with the solutions more. It also gives people the chance to preserve their relationships and understand each other better. Mediation is quite flexible, which allows for solutions that courts cannot provide."

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Main image



Beus Center for Law and Society on ASU's Downtown Phoenix campus. ASU photo