

JOYCE ANN BROWN INNOCENCE CLINIC
UNT DALLAS COLLEGE OF LAW
June 30, 2025 REPORT
For period January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025

Summary

Spring 2025 continued the operations for the Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic. The JABIC offices were open for student work with a limited percentage of office hours worked remotely are allowed. Spring enrollment saw twenty-one (21) students enrolled and twelve (12) students for the summer semester.

Our Experience

For the spring semester, we continued the team approach to selected cases. Students continued research on legal arguments, gathering factual information and exploration of potential expert witnesses. The team approach concentrates student resources on fewer cases but yields more in-depth analysis and development of legal claims. We find that the team approach encourages collaborative legal work and provides students opportunities to test theories and develop new case strategies.

In the summer session, students receive individual case assignments will not work in teams. This shift allows students to further develop independent investigation and provide research. We want students to have the opportunity to take charge and determine the course and direction of the case.

To address the increasing accumulation of pending requests, beginning with the fall semester, we implemented the following steps:

- 1) each enrolled student was assigned to respond to specific inmate letters, requesting materials and responses to specific follow-up questions;

- 2) for each assigned letter, the students contact the court of jurisdiction to obtain court records and transcripts, if not available on line;
- 3) for each assigned letter, the students download all available pleadings and court opinions;
- 4) faculty review the status of all pending matters and categorize those matters based upon the viability of additional investigation and possible legal theories.
- 5) during the weekly rounds' sessions, there are presentations on those inquiries for which follow-up materials and correspondence have been received to assess potential further action.

We hired a legal assistant who will provide needed administrative support. The assistant provides a much-needed resource for initial intake of the cases. This support person contributes to management of inquiries and other tasks, including mailing correspondence. With her participation, supervising faculty will be able to do an audit of all pending cases, formally closing those cases where no viable additional investigation can be identified. Supervising faculty is currently auditing all cases. We have also changed the workflow process so that the legal assistant can conduct the on-line identification of prior clinic screening and if the inquiry is one the clinic will decline, the legal assistant draft the declination letter for faculty review. This change further streamlines our process and provide responses to inquires at a faster rate.

Pipeline work

Our innocence clinic partnered with a local high school's senior capstone class focused on wrongful convictions. The high school class visited the law school and innocence clinic. They had the chance to hear from students currently enrolled in the class, who discussed case review and investigations. The clinic invited the chief of the Dallas County Integrity Unit, who spoke about the work and process of the Dallas District Attorney's office in wrongful conviction case investigation. It is our hope that the connection with the high school will foster an interest in this work for the next generation.

10 year Anniversary of the program

This year the Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic will celebrate 10 years at UNT Dallas College of Law. Plans are under way for an event to commemorate this achievement.

Writs of Habeas Corpus

Students teams are concentrating efforts on cases that the JABIC has determined may receive a favorable result from filing a habeas motion. After several years of delay in DNA testing, results have finally been received and entered into to Codis. Cases involving abusive head trauma in infants have been prioritized due to recent decisions from the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. Students began collaborating with the appropriate Conviction Integrity Unit and have filed an 11.07 Writ of Habeas Corpus. The teams work to develop legal strategies and to gather evidence to support the theories. We use the weekly supervisory meeting as a place to brainstorm, research and discuss case strategies. As the teams move further in the preparation of the materials, they will present their findings and tactics to the entire class during the weekly case rounds. The

teams made positive strides for information and evidence by connecting with district attorney integrity units, district clerk offices and trial counsel.

Change of science in Abusive Head Trauma

JABIC has followed with great interest the *Ex parte* Roark because the case involves abusive trauma and focuses on the changing science. Students in the summer session are closely monitoring an abusive head trauma case that is now overseen by the Texas Attorney General. A number of the cases that we are investigating involve abusive head trauma. We tasked one JABIC student to conduct research and gather cases to create a resource file tracking the evolution of this medical literature from shaken baby syndrome. This research file serves as a resource of other clinic students working on infant deaths involving head injuries.

Use of Funds

The provided funding is used in two ways: 1) contribution to salaries and 2) direct client expenses.

Contribution to salaries: supervision and management of the inquiries and investigations is conducted under the direct supervision of the Director and Assistant Director of Experiential Education. Funds are used to contribute ten percent (10%) and twenty percent (20%) respectively of those faculty members' salaries. This percentage contribution is less than the actual time expended by these faculty members on JABIC supervision and operations.

Additionally, \$10,000 of the funds are contributed to the salary of the legal assistant. This contribution allowed the department to elevate an administrative assistant position to the more specialized and skilled position of legal assistant. The legal

assistant's workload relative to JABIC exceeds the percentage contribution to the overall salary range.

The Director of Experiential Education regularly certifies the percentage allocation of workload for the Assistant Director to the JABIC.

Direct client expenses: during the review and investigation of claims specific expenses are encountered. Most commonly, the costs are associated with the acquisition of court transcripts, police records, and other documents. Expenses have also been incurred relative to experts to assist in assessment of potential claims, including DNA testing.

The procedure for such client expenses is: 1) the assigned student discusses the rationale and purpose of the expenditure with either the Director or Assistant Director; 2) the student completes a "Request for Funds" form identifying the inquiry, the requested items, and the purpose of the request; 3) that form is submitted to either the Director or Assistant Director for approval; 4) that approval and information is forwarded to administrative support staff for processing, sometimes as reimbursements for expenses already paid or for issuance of a requisition. Items to be paid from the TIDC funds are identified for the administrative staff by either the Director or Assistant Director.

WORKLOAD REPORT

Total requests for assistance received	79
Requests for assistance based on claim of actual innocence	67
# of innocence claims screened	45
# of innocence claims closed after screening	23
# of innocence claims closed after investigation	0
# of innocence claims with legal remedy pursued	0
# of innocence claims with relief granted	0
# of innocence claims with relief denied	0
# of innocence claims under active investigation at end of period	69
# of innocence claims awaiting investigation at end of period	155
# of law students participating in the project	33
# of hours worked by law students	1848
# of students from other fields of study participating in project	0
# of hours worked by students from other fields of study	0