BY BRIGETTE SIFF HOLMES

A Passion for SOCIAL JUSTICE

"My professional experiences have strengthened my view that, within our communities, there exists a growing need for effective, well-qualified lawyers for low and moderate-income clients. It is my passion for social justice and commitment to fair play in the legal system which led me to Community Lawyering. As the director of the Community Lawyering Program, I welcome the opportunity to lend my energy, ideas and experience to the continuing development of this important and innovative program."

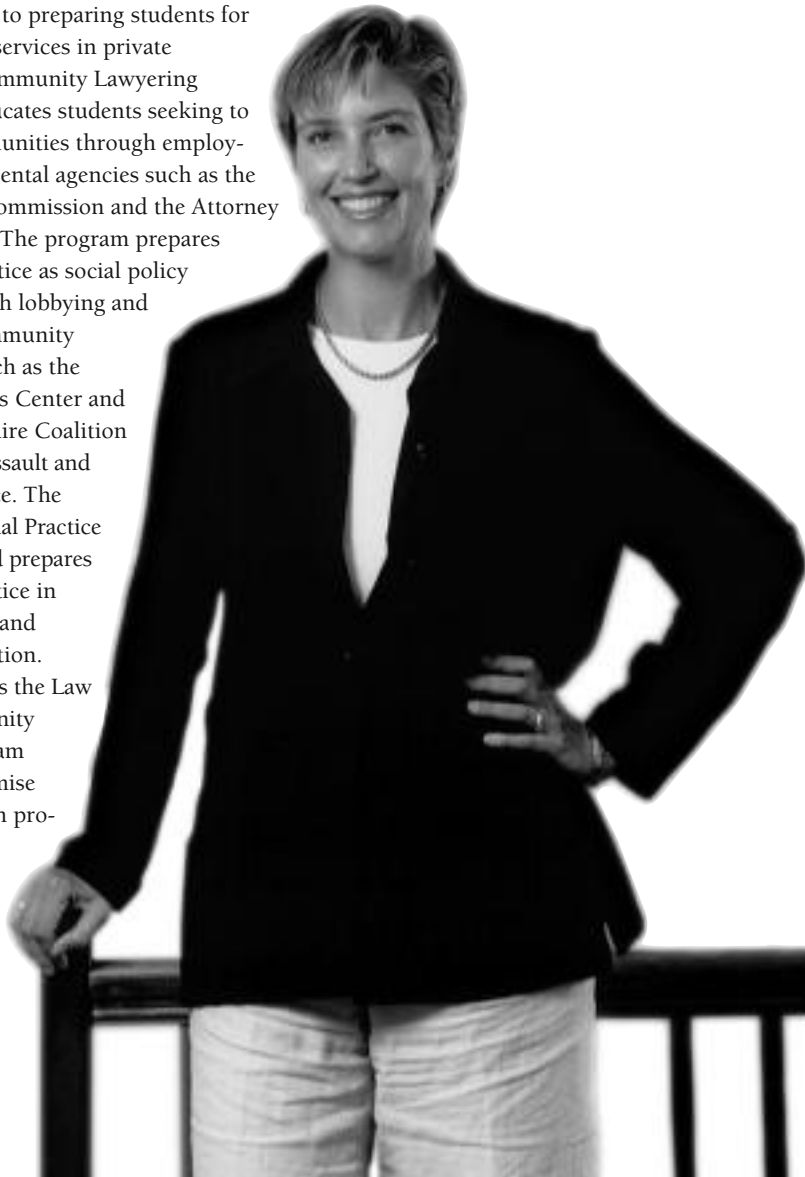
Brigette Siff Holmes
Director of Community Lawyering

What is Community Lawyering?

The Community Lawyering Program is a unique and innovative program designed to prepare law students for practice by teaching them substantive law and practical skills needed to provide effective, high quality representation to all clients. The program goes a step further than traditional preparation, however, by addressing the need for attorneys to serve under-represented populations in a private practice setting. Students are prepared to represent clients in areas such as consumer protection, landlord tenant, family, education, and criminal defense law.

In addition to preparing students for delivery of legal services in private practices, the Community Lawyering Program also educates students seeking to serve their communities through employment in governmental agencies such as the Human Rights Commission and the Attorney General's Office. The program prepares students for practice as social policy advocates through lobbying and representing community organizations such as the Disabilities Rights Center and the New Hampshire Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence. The program's Criminal Practice Section trains and prepares students for practice in criminal defense and criminal prosecution.

What makes the Law Center's Community Lawyering Program unique is its premise that attorneys can provide legal services in



private practices, in an economically viable manner, while simultaneously offering these services to a significant number of clients at a reduced fee, or on a *pro bono* basis. The Law Center takes immense pride in the large number of its graduates who fit this definition of community lawyer—and who have used the law as a positive force in a changing society and who have done so in personally rewarding and economically successful law practices.

Recent Graduates Work for Positive Change

Two recent graduates, Scott Johnson '97 and Heather Schultze '99, have found rewarding careers in public interest law. Johnson worked at the American Red Cross as an HIV/AIDS educator before coming to law school. While at the Law Center, he participated in the Civil Practice and Appellate Defender Clinics. He also participated in an essay competition at the First Annual Academic Convocation for Law Students at Suffolk University Law School, Boston, MA during his second year, and was awarded the Scholar's Paper (Third Place). During his third year, Johnson was a semi-finalist in the National Health Law Moot Court Competition.

During his externship, Johnson worked on the Claremont School District, et al *v*. State of NH lawsuit and has been involved with the case ever since. He worked during the summers for the Human Rights Commission and the New Hampshire Civil Liberties Union, utilizing funds raised through the PIC auction. Johnson also worked as a teaching assistant for moot court competitions. Currently, Johnson is an associate at Stein, Volinsky & Callaghan, P.A., Concord, NH. He practices primarily employment and education law, as well as health law, general practice and appellate work. Johnson is now co-counsel, with Andru Volinsky, for the Claremont lawsuit.

Heather Schultze '99 was enrolled in the Law Center's first community lawyering class and was active in the program, as well as in the Public Interest Coalition (PIC) during all three years of law school. Heather served as a PIC auction co-chair in her second and third years. As a second-year student, Schultze participated in the Administrative Advocacy Clinic and went on to later take part in the Civil Practice Clinic and Non-Profit Organizations Clinic. During the summer of her second year, Heather worked as a summer intern at Cape Atlantic Legal Services in Atlantic City, NJ where she represented low income tenants with housing problems in both administrative and civil hearings.

Schultze took a work study position at Legal Advice and Referral Center (LARC) during her third year. This position led to an externship at LARC where Heather was able to provide advice to clients regarding housing issues. Upon graduation, Schultze accepted a position with New Hampshire Legal Assistance in Manchester, NH where she currently practices, concentrating primarily in the areas of housing and benefits law.

Law Center Developing a Model Curriculum

The Community Lawyering Development Committee is currently completing a model curriculum, based on the findings of a recent summer extern project funded by the Soros Foundation. The final product will be an overall curriculum design for the Community Lawyering Program that would also serve as a model for similar programs at other law schools.

The current curriculum features an entry-level course, entitled Community Lawyering, available to all first-year law students during their second semester. The course is designed to expose students to the skills needed to be effective and successful community lawyers. The first half of the course focuses on criminal cases while the second half focuses on civil cases. Through classroom simulations, students gain experience preparing for and conducting client interviews, depositions, interrogatories, motions to dismiss and suppress, various hearings and mediation. Students routinely give the class high ratings and emphasize the advantage they feel they have gained by taking the class. Supplemental courses are being proposed and developed, including Lobbying, Unbundled Legal Services, and a Street Law course.

Student Goals and Expectations

Learning what students want and expect from the Community Lawyering Program has been one of my goals. During the course of panel discussions, conversations, and a focus group, what has emerged is the belief that community lawyering students view jobs—both summer positions and post-graduate jobs—as their top priority. Of equal importance to students is coming to terms with financing a career in public interest law when faced with significant law school debt and relatively low salaries. Career counseling and strategy are important components in each of these areas of student concern.

Financing Long-Term Goals

With regard to financing a career in community lawyering, the Law Center is fortunate to have a Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) that provides partial payment of student loans for graduates working in community lawyering and public interest jobs. The Community Lawyering Program is seeking to expand the Law Center's existing Loan Repayment Assistance Program by increasing funding and thereby increasing the amount of assistance available to each graduate who chooses a career in community lawyering.

Alumni Outreach

In order to ensure that community lawyering students will be able to secure challenging, rewarding externship placements, summer employment, and employment upon graduation, the Community Lawyering Program and the Office of Career Services is striving to develop and strengthen existing alliances with community lawyering practitioners. Law Center students welcome the opportunity to speak with alumni regarding their areas of practice. To participate in future events, please e-mail bholmes@fplc.edu.

Professor Siff Holmes works with and counsels Community Lawyering students regarding course selection, career paths, externships and employment, as well as developing this innovative program and its curriculum. Former assistant dean for student affairs at the Law Center, she served previously as deputy clerk of court for the State of New Hampshire Court System, supervising the Civil, Equity and Criminal Divisions and overseeing the start-up of the court sponsored ADR program in Merrimack County. She served as a public defender for seven years, representing clients charged with juvenile, misdemeanor and felony offenses in New Hampshire and Alaska. As a public defender in Alaska, she traveled extensively, representing indigent clients in remote towns and villages throughout the state. She also served for one year as a judicial law clerk for the Alaska Superior Court and as a judicial extern to the Alaska Supreme Court. She received her BA degree from the University of Virginia and JD degree from Golden Gate University School of Law.

Annual Auction Raises Needed Funds for Summer Public Interest Positions

To assist community lawyering students seeking summer positions, the Public Interest Coalition (PIC), a student organization, hosts an annual auction to raise necessary funds. Auction proceeds are awarded as stipends to qualified students who accept summer positions in firms financially unable to offer compensation. Both Heather Schultze '97 and Scott Johnson '97 were PIC grant recipients. Last summer, students worked for Planned Parenthood, Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE), Pinetree Legal Services, the Department of Education Civil Rights Division, the Rockingham County Attorney's Office, and the New Hampshire Public Defender Program.

This year's auction will take place on March 23, 2001 at the new Marriott Courtyard in Concord. To lend your support, please e-mail bholmes@fplc.edu.