

Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic

UNT Dallas College of Law
1901 Main Street
Dallas, Texas 75201



FAQs:

What does the UNT Dallas College of Law Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic (“the Clinic”) do?

Students from UNT Dallas College of Law and other UNT System institutions work together to review and investigate claims of Texas inmates that they did not do the crime for which they have been convicted. They are claiming they are actually innocent and are wrongfully in prison. Students will be involved in the investigation of the claims accepted to establish that the innocent is actually innocent. Law students will represent the inmate in any legal proceedings that may be instituted to exonerate the inmate. All students will work together in the effort to free the inmate from prison.

What types of things will students do?

Working in interdisciplinary teams and under direction of supervising faculty, Clinic students will initially review letters from inmates to evaluate the claims of innocence. Students will assist in the identification and selection of claims of innocence that should be looked into further. Students will typically read transcripts; locate documents; find witnesses; and visit the inmate in prison. Students will be actively involved in the search for any new credible information that establishes that the inmate is actually innocent.

How do I know if I want to do this?

You have to honestly ask yourself: Do I believe that mistakes can be made and a person put into prison who didn’t commit the crime? Can I remain committed to reviewing claims and investigating cases, even if there is no guarantee that I may not be able to uncover evidence that the person is actually innocent? Can I work as a member of a team and be respectful of others’ views and opinions? Can I be diligent in the work that I will be doing? Can I be creative and think outside of the box? Can I respect the confidentiality of the Clinic’s clients and keep the information confidential? Can I maintain my enthusiasm for this work even if I do not actually get the chance to go to court?

If I don’t have special training in law or specific investigative techniques, what do I contribute to this work?

You can bring fresh eyes looking at old material. You can bring your curiosity and imagination as you try to figure out what investigation can be done, and what questions

should be asked. You will bring skills and experiences that you have developed within your field of study that are different from the others on your team who are trained in other disciplines. You can bring critical thinking, tenacity, and determination. The Clinic is intentionally interdisciplinary because each discipline brings different skills and training that can be beneficial to the cases reviewed.

What will be expected of me?

Enrollment in this Clinic is for two consecutive semesters. Your first semester will begin with a series of “boot camp” classes to introduce you to the Clinic generally and the kinds of things you may need to know to successfully investigate claims of actual innocence. These classes may be held on Saturdays or they may be held during the week. For the remainder of the semester, you will be assigned to a team. Each student team will meet every week for an hour as a group. There will be a monthly meeting that will combine all Clinic students, including law students and non-law students. These team meetings may use web-assisted technology such as Skype or Blue Jeans, but some travel to other campuses may be required. Law students will spend approximately twelve hours a week working on Clinic assignments. Non-law student students will spend approximately eight to ten hours a week (depending on their departmental requirements) working on their Clinic assignments, including the boot camps and weekly meetings. You will be reporting your time in a case management system through the Clinic.

You may have additional expectations from your faculty advisor in your department in order for you to earn your credit, such as weekly journals, time sheets, a paper, etc. Those expectations should be discussed directly with your departmental faculty member.

Why do I have to enroll for two consecutive semesters?

There is a lot of information that a student learns in order to be able to evaluate claims of innocence and how to conduct investigations. Students will have classes about legal ethics, criminal procedures, obtaining public documents, investigative techniques, forensics and criminalistics, and other topics. Once you have actually started working on client cases, there will be a lot of work to do. By the end of the first semester, you will just be getting into the material and having a good sense of what needs to be done. It would not be fair to our clients for the student to leave that case just when they are really at the point at which they are able to help. Also, because students will be coming in at different times, it helps to preserve institutional memory on the cases when more seasoned interns can show incoming interns what has already been done on a case.

Who can apply?

Students enrolled at any UNT System university: UNT Dallas College of Law, UNT (Denton), UNT Dallas, or UNT Health Science Center who have the approval of their department to enroll in internships. For JABIC, non-law student students must have junior, senior, post-bacc, or graduate status; at least 12 hours of upper division credit completed within their major for undergrads; and a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Law students must have completed their 1L requirements.

What is the application process?

First, the student is responsible for contacting an appropriate faculty member within his/her major department to coordinate securing credit for the two semesters and to determine the department's requirements for earning that credit; the application process described herein is only to determine whether a student is eligible to be selected as an intern for the Clinic, but does NOT determine whether the student can earn course credit toward graduation. Both acceptance to the internship by the Clinic AND a guarantee by the student's department that they may receive two semesters of credit are essential. Once the student has discussed this within their department, the following process applies.

Non-law student students must submit:

- An application form;
- A 300-500 word essay about their interest in the Clinic;
- A disclosure form;
- A resume;
- A copy of their transcript; and
- The name and contact information for the faculty member within their department who will be approving the credit for both semesters if the student is accepted into the internship.

All materials must be submitted electronically to Gretchen Hackard (UNT Dallas – Gretchen.hackard@untdallas.edu). Summer interns are accepted on a case-by case basis. Students accepted into the internship will be notified no later than three weeks before the term starts. Students may be asked to meet for an interview. For more information or to receive a packet, contact Dr. Hackard.

UNT Dallas College of Law students must complete an application form and a 300-500 word essay about their interest in the Clinic. The application form is posted to Canvas on the Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic page. Students must also provide a transcript and writing sample. Students may be asked to meet for an interview. For more information, contact Profs. Wattley or Downes.