

Law Clinics Offer Students Career Guidance

By Dr Le Thi Chau, Law Dean, Trade Union University

Clinical Legal Education (CLE) is recognized as a way to change and reform teaching methods and law curricula, as well as a way to improve the quality of training of law students in many countries around the world. It is a new model that represents an active and effective way of socialization, by engaging in the diverse activities of legal aid. In Viet Nam, CLE is a new field.

Here, CLE began at Viet Nam National University (VNU), with representatives of VNU Hanoi-LERES. Since then, eight law clinics have been established in law schools, including Trade Union University in Hanoi, and these clinics have held many workshops to improve the practical skills of students and change legal teaching methods. They make a significant contribution in developing the soft skills of law students and are gradually improving the quality of legal education, helping to put Vietnamese education on the road to comprehensive reform and renewal.

Now there is an urgent need for CLE career mentoring activities to support all individuals to select and develop the professional skills that best suit their abilities and personal interests -- and also meet the needs of supplying human resources to the local, national and international labour market. In fact, there are many misconceptions about careers among Vietnamese students; from whether you should choose to do work you love, to



whether a prestigious university or field of study would be a better "model" to choose.

CLE Guidance

Clinical Legal Education offers effective vocational guidance for students in Viet Nam for the following reasons:

First, in Viet Nam in general, and in law schools in particular, there is a need to change the current form of teaching theory in which a "teacher reads for students." This requires innovative programs and teaching methods; therefore, CLE has an important role to play in providing content and teaching methods that will improve the quality of legal education.

Second, Vietnamese students have no concept of what their future work will be, nor any clear targets to aim for. Participation in CLE provides work experience in the office and in the community that helps law students gain proper

awareness about the legal profession and what it entails. Furthermore, it enables them to apply specific knowledge and skills they learn in the settlement of specific legal cases while still in college. CLE students also gain self-awareness of the need to change their learning methods in order to have more opportunities to participate in legal profession activities while still at school. This helps them focus on career choices.

Third, CLE contributes to diversification of the types of legal assistance available to people, which reduces the burden on the State's budget.

And finally, setting up a suitable CLE program in order to build a model law clinic is an effective way to provide a practical placement in which law students apply what they've learned.

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All together, the many activities of a CLE law clinic provide opportunities for students to gain knowledge and experience while helping to implement legal aid work for society, under the supervision and guidance of teachers and experienced lawyers. Meanwhile, such CLE clinic activity also provides an opportunity to improve the quality of law faculty by integrating training and practicing law in the "real" world. Many other countries have successfully applied this model. We here in Viet Nam, and especially at TUU, are happy and proud to be part of this global CLE movement.



Opening of clinic at TUU in December, 2010

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