



2017-18 Environmental Law Clinic Evaluation Results EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

For more than two decades, the ELC Clinic has partnered with UVic Faculty of Law to offer law students practical opportunities to assist First Nations and other members of the community with their public interest environmental concerns.

The ELC's primary objectives remain the same: train the next generation of public interest environmental lawyers and provide legal capacity to citizens to improve environmental health in British Columbia. But after so many years of doing things in much the same way, we decided it was time to review how we teach the Clinic.

Funding from a UVic Community Engaged Learning Grant helped us to complete a comprehensive evaluation of the Environmental Law Clinic course. We investigated whether the Clinic builds professional legal skills, what class and file management activities build those skills, if any, and how our instructors can improve upon the ELC Clinic experience.

Students who completed the ELC Clinic between 2007 and 2015 (and for whom we had current contact information) received an invitation to participate in a survey. We suspected that with so many ELC alumni practicing as lawyers and non-lawyer professionals, we had a wealth of information to tap. We were right.

Out of 232 students, 24 percent completed the survey, and nine respondents who were also former ELC Society Student Board members participated in a focus group to provide insight into their experiences of being involved in the ELC's governance. We considered this a fantastic response, and we recognize and appreciate the time alumni spent giving us such thoughtful and valuable comments. (On average, it took 30 minutes to complete the survey and an additional hour for the focus group calls, which is a significant commitment, in particular when 80% of respondents are currently practicing law).

The results were enlightening.

- 88 percent said that the clinic assisted them in improving their complex problem-solving skills;
- 82 percent indicated that working on a client-based project developed their skills in law practice and client management; and
- 73 percent have drawn on their experience with ELC clients in their work.

Students strongly identified their ELC experience with improving their legal research, writing, solving complex problems, applying the law, and ability to work on client files. Many identified interviewing as one of the most important skills to which they were exposed. For some, the Clinic provided their only opportunity to practice interviewing.



A number of students commented on the value of the meaningful work undertaken at the ELC, and how being able to help a real client built their confidence. They also valued the collaborative team approach, mentoring and networking opportunities, and being exposed to a professional environment.

Focus groups showed that students found it helpful and interesting to be on the ELC Board. They appreciated learning about how the organization functions and to experience the impact of ELC projects over time while also having a role in what cases the ELC agrees to take on.

In addition to the survey and focus groups, which provided us with a rich base of information and many carefully considered suggestions, we conducted a literature review and looked at student assessment in clinical legal education.

Based on the results, the continued experience of ELC staff, and recognizing the principles of effective learning in a clinical setting, we identified 13 recommendations for updating the Clinic to reflect best practices in skills-based education and provide an even richer learning experience for students.

Our task is now to renew the Clinic experience to make it even more effective in building student legal skills and providing legal capacity to our clients.