

IPTX Course Syllabus
Texas A&M University School of Law
Special Topics: Innocence Clinic

Syllabus

Course Information:

Special Topics: Innocence Clinic 2 Credits
LAW-7700P-601 CRN 25386

Instructor:

Nick Vilbas, JD

Executive Director, Innocence Project of Texas

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Office: Innocence Project Office

Available all day Wednesday, otherwise by appointment/email

Course Description:

The Innocence Project of Texas Innocence Clinic is a clinical program for second and third year law students to investigate claims of actual innocence on behalf of Texas inmates. Student activities will include document/transcript review, examining new evidence, and locating and re-interviewing witnesses. Students will also work closely with Innocence Project of Texas attorneys when cases move into the litigation phase, possibly drafting motions for DNA testing or writs of habeas corpus.

Students will work under the direct supervision of Innocence Project of Texas staff lawyers. A weekly classroom component will also explore the causes and cures of wrongful convictions as it relates to case investigation and litigation.

Students earn 2 hours of credit for the course, which includes a two-hour classroom component and completion of 130 hours of casework.

Prerequisite: One year of law school in the full-time or part-time program. No honor code violations.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student should have:

1. Knowledge of the Texas criminal justice system, with a focus on post-conviction remedies for wrongfully convicted individuals.
2. General understanding of the causes of wrongful convictions.
3. General understanding of post-conviction innocence claim investigation
4. General understanding of various bases of post conviction relief such as junk science, DNA, victim recantations, etc.

Grading/Methods for Assessing Expected Learning Outcomes:

The Innocence Clinic is a Pass/Fail course.

The expected learning outcomes for the course will be determined by the students' performance in topics relevant to the course by the following: (1) Assigned Readings, (2) Class Participation and

Completion of required Hours, and (3) Completion of one or more Case Memo and Trial Transcript Summary.

Disability Policy:

Texas A&M School of Law adheres to a disability policy that is in keeping with relevant federal law. The law school will provide reasonable accommodations as determined by the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, Rosalind Jeffers, in consultation with the University's disability services. Students must notify Dean Jeffers of any permanent or temporary disabilities and must provide documentation regarding those disabilities prior to the granting of an accommodation. Due to the law school's policy of testing anonymity, students should not discuss their disabilities with professors. For assistance, students should consult with Dean Jeffers.

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy:

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Matters of academic dishonesty by law students are governed by the Honor System Rules. All students are bound by the Texas A&M Aggie Code of Honor and the [Texas A&M University System Rules and Procedures](#). Law students are also bound by additional rules of the Law School. Students are responsible for knowing the Honor Code and Honor System Rules, complying with their requirements, and reporting known violations. Texas A&M University also has a [Student Conduct Code](#) regarding nonacademic misconduct that applies to law students.

Professionalism:

Clinic students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Students will be investigating real cases involving real people, often involving very sensitive matters.

“What does it mean to be a professional? The term refers to a group . . . pursuing a learned art as a common calling in the spirit of public service – no less a public service because it may incidentally be a means of livelihood. Pursuit of the learned art in the spirit of public service is the primary purpose.”
Dean Roscoe Pound

Course Materials:

No textbook required. Students will be provided class materials via email, download, disc or thumb drive prior to start of class.

Assignments and Readings (Subject to Change)

Class 1: August 27th

Case Review Procedures

Case Flow Chart

Sample memo and Transcript Summary

Class 2: September 3rd

Tim Cole Opinion Order

Post Conviction DNA and Actual Innocence

Class 3: September 10th
Reading TBA

Class 4: September 17th
NO CLASS – Tim Cole Statue Unveiling in Lubbock
Schedule meetings to discuss case progress on Monday/Tuesday

Class 5: September 24th
Applications for Writ of Habeas Corpus
Innocence Writs
DUE: First drafts of all case documents completed (Procedural History, Memo, Transcript Summary)

Class 6: October 1st
Suppression of Exculpatory Evidence

Class 7: October 8th
Possible Class Substitution – Exoneree Dinner Event in Dallas
Innocence CLE/Training on 9th in Dallas

Class 8: October 15th
Shaken Baby Syndrome (pg. 1- 56)

Class 9: October 22
Shaken Baby Syndrome (pg. 57-106)
DUE: Second drafts of all case documents completed (Procedural History, Memo, Transcript Summary)

Class 10: October 29th
Update on Legal Standards

Class 11: November 5th
Progress in Fire Investigations

Class 12: November 12th
Ex Parte Robbins
SB Bill 344

Class 13: November 19th
Topic/Reading TBA

Class 14: November 26th LAST CLASS
DUE: FINAL drafts of all case review documents.

