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## POLI 4390 Practicum Placement at Dalhousie Legal Aid Service

Dalhousie Legal Aid Service began in 1970 as a summer project out of the former Halifax Neighbourhood Centre. It was the first legal service for low income communities in Nova Scotia and is the oldest clinical law program in Canada. Currently, Dalhousie Legal Aid Service operates in a community-based office in the north-central neighbourhood of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Their services are available to low income individuals facing a range of legal issues. The lawyers at the clinic address a range of legal issues including: Family Law, Child Protection, Youth Justice, Human Rights, Residential Tenancies and Criminal Law. Dalhousie Legal Aid Service is also involved in community outreach, education, organizing lobbying and test case litigation to combat injustices affecting persons with low incomes in Nova Scotia. The clinic forms a unique partnership of community groups, law students, community legal workers and lawyers.

The clinical law program at Dalhousie Legal Aid Service provides an experiential learning opportunity for students at the Schulich School of Law. Every semester, 16 law students work alongside the lawyers and community legal workers at the clinic. The students are given the same privileges as an articled clerk which allows them to work with clients and represent them in court. Throughout the semester, students practice essential lawyering skills such as interviewing and counselling while also learning the basics of running a practice. Students' experiences at the clinic give them a broader outlook on how the legal system operates and provides perspective on access to justice issues.

My role at DLAS was primarily focused on reviewing and updating the curriculum for incoming law students at the Clinic. I also spent time working with community legal worker, Mark Culligan, on the implementation of a new intake method for his clients. Throughout the semester I worked on smaller projects with individual law students or staff lawyers. This work included updating the online legal files database, attending meetings with the Disability Rights Coalition and assisting law students with research.

I started working remotely due to COVID-19, but after a couple weeks I was in the office for one full day a week. The environment at the legal aid clinic was busy, but all the staff were very welcoming and open to my assistance on projects. The staff are used to having students around since a new cohort of law students arrive each semester. This made it easy for me to find projects to work on and it was a seamless transition to work with various lawyers and students. At the clinic, everyone is very busy so my work was mostly completed independently with quick meetings to discuss my progress. Some weeks were very busy when I was working on time sensitive projects, while others were slower when I was working independently on one or two projects. The following pages include my weekly schedule of my work at the clinic to provide an idea of the workload and types of projects I completed.

#### Week 1: Jan 10-14

I started my placement by meeting with my supervisor (& Executive Director of DLAS), Megan Longley, to discuss the first project I will be working on. This project involves updating the current curriculum for law students working at DLAS. I started by doing a preliminary overview of the current material on Brightspace. I identified content that was outdated and needed to be removed or replaced. All my work was completed remotely due to COVID-19.

Week 2: Jan 17-21

In my second week I continued working remotely. I wrote a summary of the work that is done at the clinic which will be used by Dalhousie while promoting all clinical programs. I also found more resources for the course page on Brightspace. I met with Mark, a community legal worker at the clinic to discuss an upcoming presentation for the law students. I will be working on this presentation about the new process for their social justice intake program which involves law students providing legal information to people with low incomes in HRM.

Week 3: Jan 24-28

This week I worked remotely on a draft of the seminar presentation about the social justice intake program for Mark, the community legal worker. I compiled the information he had written and turned it into a presentation for the law students.

Week 4: Jan 31-Feb 4

I started working in-person at the clinic for one day a week. In the morning, I sat in on the first day of the new social justice intake program. I listened to one of the law students interview a client on the phone and listened to his discussion with Mark about the case. I had been working with Mark on the seminar about the social justice intake in previous weeks. In the afternoon, I attended a seminar for the law students at the clinic about cultural competency as it relates to lawyering. Before I left in the evening, I met with Mark and the law student I had been working with and we wrapped up the social justice intake day. I was able to see how the process works in person and we discussed some potential changes to make it run more smoothly.

Week 5: Feb 7-11

This week I continued working on material for the social justice intake program including updating the intake form and creating a handout for students about the program. I also met with another lawyer at the clinic to discuss curriculum updates and a project I will be working on in the next few weeks.

Week 6: Feb 14-18

This week I met with Nadia, a lawyer at the clinic. I started working through one section of the clinic's online legal files system. I spent most of the day cleaning it up and deleting or reorganizing old or misplaced files. I also continued working on the curriculum for social justice intake and other sections of the curriculum that Nadia is working on. I compiled the list of updated resources for one section of the curriculum.

Week 7: Feb 28 – March 4

At the clinic, I completed a few small tasks in the morning. First, I uploaded some new files to the online database that I had helped reorganize a couple weeks ago. I also continued working on the application form for the social justice intake program. Mark and I have been continuously editing it as the new process evolves. In the afternoon I met with my supervisor Megan to discuss the projects I can work on for the remaining weeks of the placement. The first task I started on was the creation of a survey for the law students to complete at the end of their time at the clinic. I completed a draft of the survey and sent it along to Megan.

Week 8: March 7-11

This week I met with two law students to discuss projects they're working on and that I may work on. In the first project, the Legal Aid Clinic assists with the affidavit writing process for people who are applying for record suspensions. This service is offered with the assistance of the John Howard Society. The second project is collaboration with the Disability Rights Coalition. There is an ongoing case in which the DRC has alleged that the provincial government has systematically discriminated against people with disabilities who require income assistance. The NS court of appeal has ruled in favour of the DRC, but the province has now appealed the case. I may work on this case or other work for the DRC. Today I got caught up on the background of the case and the work of the DRC. I also continued working on ongoing curriculum materials that I'm updating.

Week 9: March 14-18

I attended an online meeting with the Disability Rights Coalition. They discussed the ongoing court case against the Province and other advocacy work they're engaging in. I will be assisting with scheduling future meetings. At the clinic, I worked on writing a hypothetical scenario for the social justice intake seminar. I also assisted a law student with their work on an upcoming event: the Dalhousie African Nova Scotian Community Weekend. I compiled a list of scholarships that are available to African Nova Scotian post-secondary students.

Week 10: March 21-25

This week I completed the survey for the law students to complete prior to the end of the semester. It asks for feedback on the seminars and curriculum. It will help Megan make further

adjustments to the curriculum and seminar schedule. In the afternoon, I started working on a plan to complete the changes to the curriculum that I had identified earlier in the semester.

### Final Weeks

I will continue to volunteer with DLAS through to the end of April when the law students also complete their work at the semester. I will be focused on implementing the potential changes to the curriculum that I identified earlier in the semester. In the last week of April, I will attend the Dartmouth Wellness Court (on zoom). Ideally, Megan would have brought me to court in person, but due to COVID, many of the court appearances are still online.