

Call for contribution for a conference:

« University Legal Clinics: between normalisation, subversion and transformation »

Joint conference of the Réseau des Cliniques Juridiques Francophones (Francophone Legal Clinics Network) and the Canadian Association for Clinical Legal Education

Organisation: Quebec University Legal Clinics

Host location: Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal

Date: June 4 and 5, 2026

University legal clinics emerged during a period of pedagogical protest about the way law was being taught in the United States in the beginning of the 20th century. Over the past century, the history of the legal clinic movement in North America has been greatly impacted by the social movements of the 1960s and 70s and thus moved towards an approach that became more globalised, and which progressively normalised the presence of legal clinics in North American universities. The transformation of legal clinics from being marginal entities to becoming accepted and even valued puts into question the very function of these legal clinics within the university institution, especially since this movement is not global and not all forms of clinics enjoy the same level of support.

Today, a wide range of university legal clinic models have two main objectives: one that is pedagogical in nature and the other, which is to support public interest. Underneath these two key objectives, which appear to go hand in hand, lie tensions, including the weight and importance each clinic gives to either objective. On the one hand, not all university legal clinics have the same understanding of what “training law professionals” means. On the other hand, the public interest objective of contributing to “access to justice” or social justice is understood and applied differently. While certain clinics concentrate on the training of professionals for the labor market – with or without a focus on social justice issues –, others insist on an education which highlights the flaws and oppressions created by the justice system, the legal profession and the law itself. In reality, under this apparent dichotomy between clinic models, most clinics must find a balance between institutional reasoning and constraints of universities, faculty and students, the bar, in addition to the job market, and the political, economic and cultural context. To deal with these multiple constraints, which vary from one context to another, legal clinics tend to continuously oscillate between strategies of normalisation, subversion or transformation.

The joint conference organised by the Réseau des Cliniques Juridiques Francophones and the Association of Canadian Clinical Legal Education (ACCLE) proposes to explore the inherent tensions experienced by legal clinics as they navigate between normalisation, subversion and transformation. By offering opportunities for legal clinics to exchange

about experiences within a variety of contexts, including from the global south — this conference will strive to open a reflection space on the way legal clinics, despite their diverse backgrounds, develop strategies to challenge established norms, while taking a clear-eyed look at the various constraints they face.

This call for contributions is open to anyone who reflects on the roles, tensions, promises and limits faced by university legal clinics: students, teachers, clinicians, workers, community partners, researchers are invited to submit. Proposals in pairs or trios (student/teacher/partner) are encouraged.

Submission guidelines

There are (4) four different types of contributions for which a person or group may submit a proposal, which can be presented **either online or in person (please indicate your preference in your submission)**.

1. Individual presentations

These are understood as 15-minute individual academic presentations on a topic related to the conference. Presenters are invited to draw on their experience and expertise, while framing their remarks in a way that encourages discussion with the audience. Selected proposals will be grouped into panels by topic, each of which will be followed by a general question-and-answer period.

Examples:

- Managing the disappointment experienced by some students in legal clinics when faced with the gap between their expectations regarding the emancipatory role of law and their awareness of its oppressive potential;
- Maintaining the critical nature of legal clinical training in the face of growing neoliberal pressures in academia;
- Resistance to a pedagogy of reproduction and indoctrination in legal clinics;
- Understanding the pressures and contributions of professional orders on clinical teaching.

2. Panel

Each panel will be entirely focused on one theme related to the conference. Presenters are invited to draw on their experience and expertise, while framing their remarks in a way that encourages discussion with the audience. Selected proposals will be grouped into panels by topic, each of which will be followed by a general question-and-answer period. A panel should not exceed one hour, including the question period.

Examples:

- The tensions and challenges in creating a legal clinic that adopts a community-based approach to law;
- Balancing the provision of individual legal advice in clinics with a collective approach to rights advocacy;
- The effects of legislation governing the legal profession on legal clinic practices;
- The education of jurists in traditional legal practice or other types of alternative practices.

3. Workshop

These will be participatory workshops on a theme related to that of the conference. The idea is to allow for collective work on a theme related to that of the conference. Those submitting proposals in this category are asked to clarify the logistics required for the event (specific room, equipment, etc.), in their submission.

Examples:

- Managing tensions related to the presence of a student with conservative political beliefs in an activist legal clinic;
- Implementing multidisciplinary collaborations between a legal clinic and another university faculty or department (social work, psychology, etc.);
- How to integrate Indigenous knowledge, practices, and perspectives into a clinical course;
- The relevance of former clinic students' participation in its projects and actions.

4. Clinical news

These will be brief 5-minute presentations on one or more issues encountered by a clinic in relation to the theme of the conference. Each presentation will be followed by 10 minutes of discussion with the audience. Presenters are invited to draw on their experience and expertise, while framing their comments in a way that encourages discussion with the audience.

Example:

- The challenges and opportunities for legal clinics in seeking recurring funding;
- The risks and impacts of a clinic taking a public stance on current political and legal issues;

- The ethical, logistical, and professional obstacles to setting up legal advice services in a legal clinic;
- The obstacles and benefits of partnership-based research in a clinical setting.

Interested individuals are invited to submit:

- A brief biography (100 words max)
- A short summary of the proposal (1000 characters max)

Proposals must be sent by November 20, 2025, to the following address: hamel.charlotte@uqam.ca.

Partial or full coverage of travel and accommodation expenses may be possible. Further information will be provided at a later date to those who request it. In processing these requests, we will pay particular attention to issues related to North–South relations. However, we would like to remind you that, despite our best intentions, certain administrative and regulatory constraints imposed by the Government of Canada, particularly regarding immigration, may limit our ability to guarantee the attendance of all participants.