

Child Advocacy Clinic Frequently Asked Questions

About the Clinic

What is the Child Advocacy Clinic?

The Child Advocacy Clinic is part of HLS's [Youth Advocacy & Policy Lab \(Y-Lab\)](https://ylab.law.harvard.edu/y-lab/). This **externship** Clinic is designed to educate students about a range of substantive issues that impact children/youth as well as to encourage critical thinking about the pros and cons of different approaches to system/social change. The Clinic has two components: a fieldwork placement and a classroom seminar. For the **fieldwork component**, students are matched with host organizations external to Harvard Law School (HLS) that are engaged in work on behalf of children using various advocacy tools and strategies to effect change. Students conduct their fieldwork as a member of the host placement's team and will report directly to a supervising attorney who works for that organization. Students then use the **seminar component** (Lawyering for Children and Youth Clinical Seminar) to discuss their ongoing work and projects, reflect on each other's varied experiences, and evaluate which strategies in the field are working and why.

Students have the option of enrolling in the fall, spring, or for an extended winter-spring Clinic.

For more information about the Child Advocacy Clinic, visit: <https://ylab.law.harvard.edu/child-advocacy-clinic/>.

Is there a difference between the fall Clinic and the spring Clinic?

No. While in any given semester the selection of field placements may vary slightly, and the seminar content may be modified in minor ways, there is no significant difference between the fall and spring clinics/seminars. However, the winter-spring clinic offers the opportunity to have a deeper experience; the extra three weeks of full-time fieldwork during winter term may create the potential for stronger working relationships and more advanced assignments as the semester progresses.

Can I take both the fall Clinic and the winter-spring/spring Clinic?

No. However, there is an option to continue working at your fieldwork placement—or to try out a new placement—in subsequent semester(s) by enrolling in an **Advanced Clinical**. To enroll in an Advanced Clinical, you must first complete one semester of the regular clinic. At the end of the regular clinic, you should discuss with Crisanne your interest in continuing as an

Advanced student. Enrollment is by application and there is a separate process from traditional registration through Helios. For more information, contact Crisanne, or see the [Office of Clinical and Pro Bono Programs website](#).

I don't have any background in children's issues. Is the Child Advocacy Clinic right for me? Are there any prerequisites?

The Clinic is relevant for students with a particular interest in children's issues, but also for students more generally interested in social change. No background working directly with children or in children's law and policy is required, and there are no prerequisites.

What substantive areas are addressed through the Clinic?

The Clinic addresses a variety of substantive areas impacting the lives of children, with a focus on:

- Child welfare/Family Regulation (abuse and neglect, foster care, and adoption)
- Education
- Juvenile Justice

What types of advocacy will I do through the Clinic? What makes the Clinic unique?

The Clinic focuses broadly on system and social change, and each student engages in different advocacy methods, depending on where they conduct their fieldwork. Host placements use a range of strategies to spark social change, such as: direct services, impact litigation, legislative and policy reform, regulatory reform, grassroots organizing, community education, and social entrepreneurship. Students then bring into the classroom seminar their varied experiences, discussing their work, their placement organization's larger vision for improving conditions for children and families, and the strengths and limitations of different advocacy approaches. To some degree, the seminar allows for all students to vicariously experience the various modes of advocacy one can use as a child advocate.

Technical Considerations (Credits, Semesters, Co-Requisites)

What are the components of the Child Advocacy Clinic?

The Child Advocacy Clinic includes both a:

- Clinical fieldwork component AND
- Classroom seminar component

Students who enroll in the Clinic will be enrolled in the classroom seminar by the Office of Clinical and Pro Bono Programs.

Which semester is the Clinic offered? How do the credits work?

Students choose among the **fall clinic**, the **winter-spring clinic**, and **spring clinic option** for their clinical fieldwork. The fall Clinic students will take the classroom seminar in the fall semester. The winter-spring and spring Clinic students will take the classroom seminar during the spring semester.

All Clinic students receive 2 classroom credits for participating in the Child Advocacy Clinic classroom seminar. Students will receive 4 or 5 clinical credits for the fall/spring fieldwork. Students who enroll in the winter-spring clinic receive an additional 2 clinical credits for their winter fieldwork.

Below is a summary of the relevant credits for fall, winter-spring, and spring students:

Fall Students

- 2 classroom credits (fall)
- 4 or 5 clinical credits (fall)

Winter-Spring Students

- 2 classroom credits (spring)
- 2 clinical credits (winter)
- 4 or 5 clinical credits (spring)

Spring Students

- 2 classroom credits (spring)
- 4 or 5 clinical credits (spring)

How many hours will I be working at my clinical placement? Will the work be remote or in-person?

In the fall and spring semesters, students work either 16 or 20 hours per week at their placement, depending on whether they opt for 4 or 5 clinical credits (1 clinical credit = 4 hours of work per week). Winter-spring students will, in addition, work full-time (32 hours per week, or 96 hours total) at their placement sites during the winter term.

As the pandemic has shifted expectations around in-office practices, our clinic placements' work environments are likewise quite varied. You will discuss directly with your placement supervisor how much (if any) work will be conducted in-person vs. virtually. For placements doing direct services and/or trial work in the Boston area, you can expect to be conducting more of the work in-person; for placements located outside of the Boston area or those doing impact litigation/policy work, you can expect to be conducting more (or all) of the work remotely. Please think about your preference for this coming term, but at the same time, plan to be flexible.

Where can I find the course descriptions?

You can find course descriptions in the [HLS course catalog](#) or on the [Y-Lab website](#).

Clinical Fieldwork Placements

With what types of organizations and agencies does Y-Lab partner?

Y-Lab partners with a wide variety of organizations and agencies, including those providing individual client advocacy, those promoting systemic change through impact litigation and legislative reform, grassroots organizing initiatives, social enterprises, juvenile courts, and appellate offices, among others. Check the Y-Lab website for a [list of the most recent placements](#).

What type of work do Clinic students do?

Based on their host placement, students may: engage in courtroom advocacy; draft briefs and other litigation memoranda; participate in school and home visits; assist with interviews of child victims; analyze social science and psychological research; leverage the media and write op-ed articles; provide trainings to various stakeholders; develop legislative reform proposals; and participate in mediations. For instance:

- In the **child welfare/family regulation** area, students may represent individual children who are abused and neglected; serve alongside District Attorneys prosecuting caretakers accused of child maltreatment; or work with juvenile court judges adjudicating care and protection and other child welfare cases.
- In the **education** area, students may engage in efforts to advance educational outcomes for low-income students; participate in special education cases; or work with the state agency charged with overseeing schools on issues such as charter schools, assessment and accountability, student rights, and school discipline.
- In the **juvenile legal system** area, students may support legislative changes to improve conditions of confinement for young people; promote policies to reform the legal system for youth of color; or work alongside public defenders in delinquency and youthful offender cases.

Note that many placements cut across substantive areas and engage students in a host of advocacy strategies and skills.

How do I get assigned to a fieldwork placement?

Once you are enrolled in the Clinic, Crisanne will provide you with a list of placement sites and descriptions of their potential projects. You will provide Crisanne with information about your background and interests and rank your placement preferences. You will be matched with a placement in accordance with your preferences to the degree possible, but keep in mind that we cannot guarantee a particular placement. We work to provide students with a broad spectrum of experiences so as to enrich the classroom seminar and foster discussion about different advocacy strategies. Historically, almost all students have been matched with one of their top 4 choices.*

Is there financial assistance available?

Y-Lab can provide a limited amount of assistance for local transit passes (i.e., a Charlie Card). For students physically working outside of the Boston area during winter term, Y-Lab will cover the cost of transportation and housing within a limited but reasonable budget.

Winter-Spring Option

Tell me more about the winter-spring option. How does that work?

The winter-spring option enables students to work for a greater period of time at either a local Boston-area placement or at a leading organization around the country.* Winter-spring students work full-time at their organizations during winter term, and then continue to work part-time at the same agency during the spring term. Note that for students placed outside of the Boston area, the student may conduct their work on-site at the agency during the winter term (depending on current office protocols) and then return to Cambridge for spring term, working remotely for the organization. This option has the advantage of helping students form relationships with organizations outside of Boston, if desired; and regardless of fieldwork site, this option allows students to have a deeper experience due to the extra three weeks with the agency. **If you are interested in exploring the possibility of enrolling in the winter-spring clinic, please talk to Crisanne (chazen@law.harvard.edu) as soon as possible.**

What type of projects might I do if I sign up for the winter-spring option and am placed with an agency outside of Boston?

Depending on the placement, a winter-spring student might draft memoranda, briefs, and other court documents for litigation; develop legislative reform proposals; analyze social science and psychological research; engage in written work for a variety of types of publications (legal journals, popular press, guides for practitioners, content for websites); provide strategic advice; or create, conduct, and analyze interviews. Most assignments will be research and writing-based. Winter-spring students working outside of the Boston area generally do not engage in direct services work, since they are working remotely for their organization during the spring term and thus are not able to have direct client contact during that time.

Contact

Who do I contact if I have more questions?

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How can I learn more about the Child Advocacy Program, including non-clinical courses?

Visit the Y-Lab website: <https://ylab.law.harvard.edu/>.

****Please note that for the winter-spring and spring options, Crisanne may prioritize a student enrolled in the winter-spring clinic for certain placements. Thus, if you have a strong interest in being placed at a particular local agency, you may need to demonstrate a greater commitment by enrolling in the winter-spring clinic. If you have any questions about which clinic option is right for you, please contact Crisanne Hazen (chazen@law.harvard.edu).***