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Practice-Oriented Training of Students at Law Clinics as a Factor Influencing Accessibility of Legal Assistance

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the role of legal aid clinics in enhancing access to justice. The first part provides a brief overview of law clinics history and development of clinical legal education in some English-speaking countries, highlighting the US evolution from student-led initiatives to accredited experiential learning, the UK's community-focused programs, Australia's community-center-based clinics, and Singapore's mandatory pro bono requirements. Dual goal setting — providing citizens with access to justice and students with real cases experience — is an important characteristic feature of the majority of legal aid clinics. The second part deals with clinical legal education in Russia, where clinics emerged in 1995 and now number about 200 nationwide, coordinated by the Center for Development of Legal Clinics. A case study of Saratov State Law Academy's clinic illustrates its structure: tiered student involvement (from interns-observers to consultants), specialized supervision by faculty and/or practitioners, and outreach programs aiding diverse groups of vulnerable citizens. Empirical data from a Saratov State Law Academy students' survey reveals reasons for joining the law

clinic, students' preferences in work carried out in the clinic, their evaluation of gained experience and importance for future careers. The article concludes that integrating compulsory credit-bearing clinical coursework would advance both educational outcomes and access to justice.

Keywords: law school clinic; access to justice; accessibility of legal assistance; free legal aid; clinical legal education

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I. Introduction

Providing access to justice is one of Russian legal policy priority areas and it constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon. Access to justice guarantees are implemented both in the court system sphere and in the sphere of judicial proceedings. Access to justice studies have allowed scholars to interpret the concept itself, as well as to reveal its essence. Access to justice is interpreted, firstly, as a principle of civil and commercial court procedures in the sphere of court system and legal proceedings, secondly, as an independent legal phenomenon, thirdly, as a task of judicial proceedings in courts (Zhuykov, 2006; Shamshurin, 2011, p. 5; Masaladzhiu, 2009, p. 9; Sidorenko, 2002, pp. 8–9). At the same time, the gravity center shifts either towards organizational or towards procedural guarantees of access to justice. Among access to justice conditions, scholars name guarantees for needy persons to receive legal assistance, including free legal aid (Shakaryan, 2001).

Free legal aid accessibility for citizens (in cases established by the Russian Federation legislation) is proclaimed as one of principles of providing free legal aid to citizens. The accessibility of legal aid in Russia is ensured:

- by genuine free provision of such assistance to persons entitled to receive it;
- by eliminating bureaucratic barriers through simplifying the procedure for collecting documents confirming this right enjoyment and decreasing documents quantity;
- by creating a targeted system of legal assistance regardless of a person's place of residence (for example, through providing online consultations for people living in hard-to-reach areas);
- by establishing convenient work schedules and visiting hours for citizens;
- by language comprehensibility, simplicity of legal structures explanation (Ostapenko, 2013).

Non-accessibility of legal assistance is caused by gaps in legal regulation of a right to qualified legal assistance, court red-tapery, high cost of legal services provided, corruption, etc. (Ostapenko et al., 2012). A system of organizations providing free legal aid is represented by governmental and nongovernmental entities, law school clinics occupying a special place. Nowadays, in the Russian Federation there operate 300 Law school clinics,¹ which are structural divisions of universities or academic organizations. Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation Order No. 166 dated 19 August 2022 set up a procedure for maintaining a list of law clinics and posting it on the RF Ministry of Justice official website.

Law clinics are authorized to provide free legal aid in the form of oral or written legal advice (Part 4, Art. 23, Federal Law No. 324-FZ dated 21 November 2011 “On Free Legal Aid in the Russian Federation”), however, there are some modern trends of their development. One of perspectives in law clinic development is online counselling. Moreover, a possibility of expanding a provided services range is being actively discussed, in particular, an issue of representing citizens' interests in

¹ List of Law Clinics. Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation Official Website. Available at: <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/pages/spisok-yuridicheskikh-klinik/>. (In Russ.). [Accessed 24.04.2026].

court is of vital importance. In addition to work related to consulting citizens on legal issues and drafting procedural documents, law clinics are able to cover such a segment of a legal services market as providing assistance in reconciliation.

Trend-setting ways in expanding law clinic activities supported by a thoughtful approach to their implementation can increase the accessibility of free legal aid, modernize law clinic work, and expand a range of practical skills acquired by students, the latter fully meeting goals of practice-oriented training. Some researchers note that performance of a law clinic social function in providing free legal aid to low-income people competes with an educational function of training law students in practical work with clients (Isaenkova, 2020). In this regard, it is important to conduct a separate study of an educational component in law clinic activities, to investigate students' attitude to this form of training, and to offer ways for developing law clinics work.

II. Clinical Legal Education in Different Countries

Formally the first law clinic appeared in the USA, so it is important to study clinical legal education roots to be able to use and implement existing successful modality and to offer new ways of its development. Originally being British colonies, the United States adopted many things typical of the metropole, legal education not being an exception. By the end of the 18th century almost all newly appeared states had a "trained bar" (Gubbins, 2011) and apprenticeship was the main way to become a lawyer. This particular fact would later become an obstacle to include clinical education programs in curricula as "Law schools wanted to distinguish themselves from apprenticeships" (Gubbins, 2011). Looking at Clinical Legal Education timeline one can see that first law schools appeared almost at the same time (the end of the 18th century) and in 1860 twenty law schools already trained future lawyers, however, only in 1893 an ABA Section of Legal Education was created and in 1923 first 39 law schools were approved by ABA.²

² Clinical Legal Education in the United States of America Time Line. Columbus School of Law. Available at: <https://www.law.edu/nacle/timeline.html> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

Although at the edge of the 20th century law schools were not required to include practical training in their curricula, in 1893 “a student club at the University of Pennsylvania established a legal aid dispensary” (Ogilvy, 2009, p. 4), which is considered the first law school clinic. First decades of the 20th century saw instituting legal aid clinics and societies by both universities and students, however, only volunteering students worked there receiving no credits for their practical training. In 1930-s a new approach to the study of law, distinct from case study and Socratic method prevailing at that time, was introduced by “legal realists,” a group of academics from some law schools, who encouraged students to analyze the existing law and think about possible changes addressing current societal problems (Wizner, 2002, pp. 1931–1932). Legal realist movement encouraged development of clinical legal education intellectually (Wizner, 2002, p. 1933) but it was not compulsory yet and “in 1951 there were only 28 clinics” (Gubbins, 2011).

The Civil Rights movement and, later, protests against the Vietnam War, when “most clinics were student-run and extracurricular,” made law students who had already actively provided free legal assistance and travelled South to help Black lawyers demand curricular reform, “calling for... practical education to prepare them for practice in areas like poverty law, as well as course credit for pro bono legal assistance” (Rothstein, 2023). Moreover, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (War on Poverty Act) cleared the way for clinical legal education financial support “in the person of... a Vice-President of the Ford Foundation... responsible for the Foundation’s anti-poverty initiatives” (Wizner, 2002, p. 1933). By 1970 the number of “credit-bearing clinical programs grew” up to 80³ and in 1973 “professional skills, such as counseling... and trial and appellate advocacy” appeared in the ABA Law School Accreditation Standards (Joy, 2018).

1960-70’s clinics pursued two objectives: to arrange an interactive legal training for law students and to provide those unable to afford lawyers with free legal services (Kotkin, 2019). Although providing access to justice primarily rests on the government, law schools can contribute to resolving this task and one of the main goals of starting a law clinic is

³ Available at: <https://www.law.edu/nacle/timeline.html> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

to provide legal representation for the poor. “Lawyers who had worked in legal aid and public defender programs” shared their knowledge and experience with the students increasing their awareness “of the needs of the poor and oppressed” (Aiken and Wizner, 2004, pp. 997–998). Clinical faculty developed clinical programs and at the same time the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement started growing: events which allowed to teach law students “to use the law as an instrument for social justice and change” (Joy et al., 2000, p. 9). By the end of 1980s these efforts changed the vision for clinical education from just “a law-related activity outside the classroom” to “a method of teaching that included student involvement with problems the lawyers confront in practice, that they help deal with the problems and student performance is subjected to intensive critical review” (Gubbins, 2011).

Today “law clinics are a staple of legal education” (Rothstein, 2023) in the USA. Although the ABA standards for law school accreditation require “every student to have at least six credits of experiential courses, defined as simulation, law clinic, or externship courses” (Joy, 2018, p. 580) working at a law clinic is not compulsory and clinicians strive to make law schools develop curricula meeting the societal demands for well-prepared practitioners. However, US leading law schools offer their students a diverse clinical experience. For example, Harvard Law School gives its students an opportunity to participate in “more clinical placements than any law school in the world”⁴ having 24 in-house clinics,⁵ 13 externship clinics,⁶ and the Independent Clinical Program.⁷

Law schools in the US have already started preparing law students to providing assistance in reconciliation through combining clinical education and theoretical courses: the first mediation clinic appeared

⁴ Clinical Education. Harvard Law School. Available at: <https://hls.harvard.edu/clinics/> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

⁵ In-House Clinics. Harvard Law School. Available at: <https://hls.harvard.edu/clinics/in-house-clinics/> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

⁶ Externship Clinics. Harvard Law School. Available at: <https://hls.harvard.edu/clinics/externship-clinics/> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

⁷ Independent Clinical Program. Harvard Law School. Available at: <https://hls.harvard.edu/clinics/independent-clinical/> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

in Moritz College of Law in 1983⁸ followed by Cardozo Law in 1985⁹ and many other law schools. For instance, at a UC Law SF mediation clinic students are offered “a joint program of Center for Negotiation and Dispute Resolution (CNDR) and the Community Justice Clinics” which allows them to get knowledge and experience in dealing with conflicts and dispute resolution and be ready for any type of practice.¹⁰ Research based on a review of 48 mediation clinics websites shows that law schools use different approaches to students’ training at mediation clinics: “about one third are taught by tenure-track faculty, one third are taught by clinical faculty, and one third are taught by adjunct or other faculty” (Lande, 2024, p. 5) and the process of developing mediation representation programs is of vital importance for diverse stakeholders.

Turning to the United Kingdom one can start discussing clinical legal education by mentioning a charity — the Clinical Legal Education Organisation (CLEO) — that actively supports UK law schools on their way to develop clinical legal education. At a 2016 CLEO conference a group of clinicians started a discussion that resulted in publication of “The Clinical Legal Education Handbook” (Thomas and Johnson, 2020) that presents a framework for creating a law clinic at a university law school. Clinical education dual mission (“social justice and education”) determines clinical programs to “meld legal theory with lawyering skills, and students learn lawyering values by providing legal assistance to clients who would otherwise lack access to justice” (Thomas and Johnson, 2020, p. 283).

Similar to US law schools UK law schools actively participate “in plugging the access to justice gap” through law clinics which have taken rightful place in legal education (Ashton, 2024, p. 37). Moreover, alongside with “a credit-bearing law clinic” which “is becoming an increasingly standard feature of the ‘offer’ to prospective students” other community-oriented programs are introduced within a clinical legal education module (Ashton, 2024, p. 66). One of the examples is the StreetLaw program, a part of Street Law Inc. operating in 45 countries

⁸ Mediation Clinic. The Ohio State University. Available at: <https://moritzlaw.osu.edu/academics/clinics/mediation-clinic> [Accessed 05.06.2025].

⁹ Cardozo Law. Available at: <https://cardozo.yu.edu/mediation-clinic> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

¹⁰ UC Law. San Francisco. Mediation Clinic. Available at: <https://www.uclawsf.edu/clinical-programs/mediation-clinic/> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

since 1996 and aimed not only at clinical education but at Public Legal Education as well. Students' participation in this program not only enriches them with experiential learning but also provides opportunities to impact communities and get useful feedback (Ashton, 2024, p. 68).

One more way to reach an access to justice goal of clinical legal education is establishing outreach clinics in deprived areas of the country. Besides proving free legal aid such projects can have additional objectives. For instance, the Blackpool project of Lancaster University Law Clinic was aimed at investigating "the specific challenges individuals are facing when attempting to access legal advice and other related services" (Nyoni-Wood, 2025, p. 22). The project allowed the participants, both students and solicitors involved, to identify opportunities of an outreach clinic and challenges necessary to be overcome while the experience gained allows them to outline steps to be taken to improve the clinic work such as "building better community relationship," increasing clinic working hours, and variegating ways of clinic "advertising" (Nyoni-Wood, 2025, p. 29).

Mediation clinics operate throughout the UK as well following different paths and finding their place in communities and court systems. A University of Strathclyde Mediation Clinic is an encouraging illustration of faculty, students and professional mediators cooperation. Established in 2012 the clinic provided "a free mediation service in 16 of Scotland's 39 sheriff courts" in 2021 (Irvine, 2021) and the number of courts increased up to 18 in 2023 plus four courts served by Edinburgh CAB Mediation Services.¹¹ The key to success is pracademic style the clinic uses "moving through documentation, to theory building, to teaching and training, to action partnerships" (Irvine, 2021, p. 9).

Clinical legal education started developing in Australia in 1970-s and followed different ways in different universities and states (Giddings, 2014). However, there is a distinguishing feature of Australian clinical legal education: "basing a clinical programme in a community legal centre" (Dickson, 2000, p. 39). An emphasis on community service and focus on real cases are characteristic to Australian law clinics as well as an accent on client-centered lawyering when students

¹¹ Free mediation clinics to be expanded across Scotland. Scottish Legal News. Available at: <https://www.scottishlegal.com/articles/free-mediation-clinics-to-be-expanded-across-scotland> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

are taught to take responsibility for their clients. Australian clinicians participate in both teaching and academic activities being contributors to journals and creators of programs. Their work “goes well beyond a focus on legal skills development and concentrates on social justice issues” (Giddings, 2014).

In the last ten years as a result of reforms Singapore’s legal system has developed a nation-wide network of community-based legal clinics for providing legal advice to the needy where volunteer lawyers work *pro bono*. Another result is “at least 20 hours of *pro bono* work as part of their (law students’) degree requirements,” the requirement mainly performed in law clinics within “Faculty-led *pro bono* legal activities” (Ong, 2024, p. 70). Finding effective ways to combine lawyers’ *pro bono* work with students’ credit-bearing clinical education will benefit all stakeholders: students will gain practical experience, volunteer lawyers will have their workload reduced, and, as a result, more clinic attendees will get high-quality legal services (Ong, 2024).

We do not purport to present a complete report about state of clinical legal education in the world but just to give its overview to find out common features and modern trends. Despite various organizational models most legal aid clinics function on the basis of a dual-goal model: to provide legal assistance to those who cannot afford lawyers and to give law students an opportunity to gain experience and understanding of real practice.

III. Law Clinics in Russia

III.1. The History of Law Clinics in Russia

Law clinics emergence in Russia is associated with the name of a Kazan University professor Dmitrii Meir (1819–1856), who in the middle of the 19th century substantiated the need for practical training of law students and organized a legal aid clinic, where he advised clients in the presence of students. This law clinic functioned about 10 years but after its closing legal clinical education ideas were forgotten for decades (Polyakov, 2010, p. 66). However, in the beginning of the 20th century a lively discussion about reviving legal clinics within the framework

of a practice-oriented approach to legal education started in academic literature and in 1901 Professor Alexander Lyublinskii described law clinics work principles paying special attention to free-of-charge basis of legal assistance (Atagimova, 2021, p. 13), yet law clinic projects were not implemented and the idea was not called for.

Clinical legal education went through a tremendous upgrowth in the last half of the 20th century in the USA (see above) and by the end of the century law clinics appeared in many countries all over the world (Polyakov, 2010, p. 67). As for the Russian Federation the first law clinic appeared at Petrozavodsk State University in 1995. The advance of clinical legal education began in the late 1990s, when statutory documents on university law clinics activities were adopted,¹² and clinics formation began. Currently, there are about 200 legal clinics in Russia (Polyakov, 2010, p. 68). Some universities, for example, the Saratov State Law Academy, have a network of legal clinics opened at educational institution branches. The coordination of all law clinics in the country is handled by the Center for the Development of Legal Clinics which cooperated with more than 100 universities of Russia and neighboring countries.¹³ Currently, the Center for the Development of Legal Clinics conducts off-site internships for teachers and students from different cities as well as organizes conferences on current issues in clinical education.

III.2. Some Current Clinical Legal Education Trends in Russia

Large law schools ensure legal clinics functioning throughout a working day, students interviewing and consulting citizens in shifts. Such way of work makes legal clinics quite competitive and full-fledged

¹² Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No. 994 dated 28 November 2012 "On approval of the Procedure for the establishment of legal clinics by educational institutions of higher professional education and the procedure for their activities within the framework of the non-governmental system for the provision of free legal aid."

¹³ Autonomous non-profit organization "Center for the Development of Legal Clinics." Available at: <https://asi.org.ru/ngoprofile/czentr-razvitiya-yuridicheskikh-klinik/> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

entities providing free legal aid. Moreover, some universities actively practice trips to municipal districts of a region to consult socially vulnerable citizens on legal issues. Thus, a right to free legal aid is successfully implemented and guarantees accessibility of justice in civil cases. The scope of provided assistance allows citizens not only to apply to the court with a competently drawn up statement of claim (complaint), but also to represent their interests in court independently, and, if it is necessary, seek a piece of advice on procedural issues from the legal clinic. On the other hand, the sliding schedule of legal aid clinics, typical of small law schools, is indicated as a clinics' disadvantage that negatively affects the accessibility of free legal aid. The reason for it is a small number of teachers and students studying and their busy schedule in the educational process (Popova, 2014).

A current trend in the development of legal clinics is remote counseling. It was the Covid-19 pandemic that changed educational format and made universities start using distance learning technologies, law clinics not being an exception. The pandemic has been overpassed; however, remote counseling has turned out to be a high-potential tendency of legal aid clinics development with several types of legal assistance provided:

- sending client's documents to a law clinic's e-mail address, their subsequent analysis by interns and drafting a necessary procedural document;
- using video conferencing through various applications (Zoom, Sber-jazz, and others) to receive a face-to-face legal advice;
- contacting a legal clinic via a phone call to receive prompt legal assistance (Ektov, 2016);
- posting materials on legal awareness in the media and on the Internet.

Law clinic employees, clinicians and students-interns do not have any difficulties working in a virtual format, moreover, some clients feel even more comfortable being at home during such consultation. Diverse instruments can be used: video calls through popular messengers; an exchange of e-mails; a web-office; a combination of the above. Online counseling allows to increase the availability of legal services for citi-

zens living in remote areas, save time and money, since there is no need for a face-to-face visit to a law clinic (Ttuyan, 2022).

On the one hand, information technologies usage outspread in law clinic activities contributes to increasing accessibility of legal assistance, allows providing free legal services to a wider range of people entitled to them, and gives students an opportunity to obtain greater amount of legal knowledge and practical skills in various areas of law. On the other hand, the issues of unidentified clients' applications to a law clinic and of personal data protection when transmitting information have not been resolved yet.

One more debated law clinic development perspective is representing clients' interests in court by interns under curators' supervision, the idea which does not find widespread support in higher education institutions. Expanding services variety will definitely increase availability of free legal services for citizens, however, despite the proposal advance (to grant interns a right to represent citizens' interests in court proceedings) one should adequately assess responsibility that universities will have to bear for providing this kind of free legal assistance. It is necessary to note that clinicians and interns should meet criteria for accessibility and quality of free legal aid set up in Order of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation No. 157 dated 20 May 2024 "On approval of the standard for the provision of free legal aid by entities specified in Paragraph 4 of Part 1 and Part 2 Art. 15, Part 2 Art. 22 of Federal Law No. 324-FZ dated 21 November 2011 'On Free Legal Aid in the Russian Federation,' and the procedure for ensuring control over compliance with its requirements." It is hardly appropriate to talk about interns, people not having a law degree, providing qualified legal assistance to clients in court. At the same time, they can act as assistants to a curator practicing as a court lawyer and carry out his/her particular assignments.

Yet one way to expand legal services variety is providing assistance in reconciliation, in fact, mediation clinics successfully operate not only in foreign law schools (see above) but in the Russian Federation.¹⁴ Indeed, when it comes to protecting violated or disputed rights,

¹⁴ The Conflictology Clinic (Mediation and Counseling Service in Conflict). Available at: <https://english.spbu.ru/partners/conflictology-clinic-mediation-and-counseling-service-conflict> [Accessed 24.04.2026].

traditionally people think only of judicial or administrative procedures, while alternative dispute resolution procedures are unfairly kept silent. However, in light of state support for mediation, this method of dispute resolution cannot be ignored. Considering mediation undoubted advantages, in particular, reducing judges' workload, saving parties' money and time for dispute resolution, it is necessary to empower legal clinics to conduct mediation procedures. These procedures can be conducted by teachers, provided that they receive additional education on mediation procedure application, in accordance with Art. 16 of the Federal Law "On an Alternative Dispute Resolution Procedure with Participation of a Mediator," while students will get an opportunity to gain experience in alternative dispute resolution.

And finally, an important area of law clinic activities is on-site counselling of socially vulnerable categories of citizens in remote areas of a region, in social protection institutions, in probation service institutions, and/or in rehabilitation centers for temporarily displaced persons.

III.3. Law Clinic of Saratov State Law Academy

Saratov State Law Academy established a law clinic in 1999 and now there are 4 clinics functioning in the Academy, SSLA International Law Institute, Balakovo and Astrkhan Academy branches. About 1,000 students of Saratov State Law Academy work in its law clinics annually. Their activities vary depending on their training program, specialty, and year of study. The law clinic is an optional subject that students can take for a semester, a year, or several years. However, second-year students have a compulsory introductory internship at the law clinic, when they attend consultations, become acquainted with law clinic activities, take special online courses on the Academy educational portal, take part in master classes and listen to lectures of practicing lawyers organized by the legal aid clinic. A practice-oriented training system through the portal allows increasing a legal clinic capacity to train students. In fact, the Saratov State Law Academy has successfully implemented an idea that existed for ten years as a progressive idea to introduce distance tech-

nologies into the practical training of lawyers (Hudoykina and Evteeva, 2013).

Turning to law clinic functioning in general, it is necessary to note that the first- and second-year students do not have a right to independently consult citizens, but they can attend citizens' interviews and assist law clinic interns. As a rule, in the third year, students get a legal clinic intern status and are allowed to provide free oral and written legal assistance to citizens, both accompanied by a teacher-curator, and independently. Senior students carry out their activities as consultants, independently interviewing visitors and providing assistance to junior interns.

The law clinic interns receive citizens in accordance with an approved schedule in two shifts daily. Thus, a student has an option to choose time of training in the legal clinic depending on their classes schedule. The number of interns' "office hours" in the legal clinic is not strictly regulated, but it cannot be less than once a week. Currently there are at least 50 law clinic curators, Academy faculty (with and without attorneys' license) and practicing lawyers (also with and without attorneys' license), who supervise and train interns. The curators have a consulting profile depending on the branch of law in which they specialize. Thus, consulting on land issues is carried out by curators — professors of the Land Law Department, on employment issues by curators — professors of the Labor Law Department, family or other issues — by curators of relevant departments teaching a respective subject. Issues related to court protection of citizens' rights are considered by interns accompanied by curators of the Civil Procedure Department. Thus, a student-trainee at his own discretion determines the branch of law that is most interesting and relevant to him/her from the curriculum point of view, and he or she is assigned to this profile curator. Thus, synchronous practical and theoretical study of law subjects is ensured.

Particular attention should be paid to special legal aid days, which are regularly held in the law clinic to provide assistance to certain categories of citizens on specific issues — orphans, refugees, persons evicted from emergency housing, etc. Within such events framework, practical workers of profile authorities — a prosecutor's office, a social services office, the federal service of court bailiffs-executives of the social fund,

etc. — are involved, and they directly participate in resolving problems, and also accept written applications of law clinic visitors. At the same time, the interns can receive career guidance knowledge in their future profession.

Thus, currently the interns of the Saratov State Law Academy legal clinic together with their curators go to rehabilitation centers to provide consultations to citizens evacuated from territories of the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic, the Kursk, Bryansk, and Belgorod regions. Most often, the interns provide assistance to refugees on issues of acquiring Russian Federation citizenship, receiving pensions and benefits, registering as disabled, and registering as persons in need of better housing conditions. In addition to oral consultations, the interns together with their curators draw up legal documents to be sent to certain government agencies to receive social assistance and support: requests, applications, complaints about authorized bodies omission, etc. If necessary, appeals to a prosecutor's office and court are also drawn up.

In probation service departments, the legal clinic interns provide legal assistance on civil law issues, namely on issues of paying alimony for minor children maintenance, employment, receiving pensions and benefits, accession to heirship, divorce, acquiring housing rights, and other issues. Such on-site appointments for citizens help the interns get a full understanding of their future profession, acquire practical skills in application of family, employment, civil, land, social security and other branches of Russian law rules. Moreover, the interns directly participate in implementation of state policy of assistance and socialization of persons who, for various reasons, find themselves in a difficult life situation.

Currently, the Saratov State Law Academy is implementing a project to introduce an optional course of additional education "Legal Counseling," which will include a course of lectures and practical classes aimed at forming and mastering lawyering skills necessary for providing legal services to people in various branches of law. Students, having received theoretical knowledge on the most popular aspects of legal practice, will be able to simultaneously consult citizens in the legal clinic in order to develop and strengthen practical skills.

IV. Law Clinic Place in Curriculum: Students' Survey

Students were at the origins of legal aid clinics and it seems relevant to look into students' vision of clinical legal education and its place and content in a law school curriculum.

We prepared a short survey consisting of 3 questions to fix respondents' status and 7 questions to elicit their attitudes to different aspects of clinical education experience, reasons for joining the clinic, impacts on their careers. The questionnaire consisted of yes/no questions; multiple choice questions with one or several answers and a possibility to enter "other"; scales. The obtained empirical data are systematized in pivot tables in Microsoft Excel.

The survey was conducted through Yandex Forms and reached 70 respondents: 35.8 % — academy graduates, 47.1 % — 3rd year students, 17.1 % — 2nd year students. 60 % of the respondents worked in the law clinic 1 term, 11.4 % — 2 terms, and 28.6 % of the respondents chose the answer "other" indicating: 3 years — 2 answers, 2 and a half years/5 terms — 6 answers, 2 years — 4 answers, 3 terms, half of a term, several times — one answer each.

Answering the question about reasons of joining the law clinic (several answers possible) 79.8 % of the respondents chose "to get experience of work with real clients"; 10.7 % — "in company with other students"; only two respondents pointed out "compulsory subject"; "other" reasons (7.1 %) are "encouragement at the exam" (3 answers); "to help people" (1 answer); "because of the professor" (1 answer).

Answering the question about a priority form of law clinic work (several choices possible) the respondents indicated more than one option (138 answers): the most popular variant is "consultation of citizens under clinic curators" supervision (61 answers); "drafting procedural documents" — 42 answers; "group work with a case" — 30 answers; "solving problems online" — 5 answers. Nothing was added in "other."

To evaluate the experience gained at the law clinic the respondents used a 1–5 scale (1 — useless, 5 — very useful). 74.3 % of the respondents appraised it as "very useful"; 14.3 % — "useful"; there were 6 neutral answers; numbers 1 and 2 got one answer each. Although almost 90 % of the respondents evaluated the law clinic experience positively only 70 % of them consider that a law clinic course should be a compulsory

subject in a law school curriculum. However, 91.4 % agreed that law clinic internship facilitated acquisition of law subjects. As for employment opportunities 60 % stated that a law clinic internship certificate helped them to get a position.

V. Conclusion

An academic literature study shows that law clinics activities significantly increase availability of qualified legal assistance for socially vulnerable groups of population on an ongoing basis. Providing legal services in a variety of forms, both in person and remotely, gives an opportunity to consult people with limited mobility; persons living in far-distance and/or localities; persons in a difficult life situation. As legal assistance in law clinics is provided by students both advantages and disadvantages can be found in this type of legal practice.

Among drawbacks of legal clinics activities, the first thing to mention is voluntary basis of interns' work, which leads to irregular nature of their engagement depending on a schedule (subject to change during a semester), periods of holidays and compulsory internships. Secondly, lack of a compulsory legal counseling course in curricula of many Russian law schools reduces a level of demand for legal clinics among students, does not motivate them to acquire practical skills during their studies at a university.

Legal clinic benefits are students' involvement in systematic legal assistance to citizens in various formats: counselling, drafting legal documents, supporting court cases without attending hearings. It was real-life work experience that was named by the majority of the respondents (79.8 %) as the reason for joining the legal clinic, with "client counseling" and "drafting legal documents" named as priority forms of work in the legal clinic, 87 % and 60 % respectively. Moreover, almost 90 % of the respondents rated the experience gained as "very useful" and "useful."

The effectiveness of work in the legal clinic is ensured by continuity of interns' generations, by increase in interns' status depending on length and quality of work in the legal clinic from an intern-observer to a consultant. Although 60 % of the respondents worked in the legal

clinic for only 1 semester (technically, a compulsory introductory internship for one of Academy training programs), about 30 % worked/continue to work until the end of their studies at the Academy.

Work in the Academy legal clinic progress is confirmed by a certificate awarded upon internship completion. 60 % of the respondents confirmed that having such a certificate helped them get a job. All the above makes us conclude that legal education development requires a transition to practice-oriented teaching methods synchronized with classes in a legal clinic. 70 % of the respondents agreed with the statement that a law clinic course should be a compulsory subject in a law school curriculum, moreover, 91.4 % of them stated that law clinic internship facilitated acquisition of law subjects. So, we believe that implementing a “Legal Counseling” course in a law school curriculum alongside with compulsory credit-bearing law clinic internship corresponding to students’ specialization will facilitate improving legal clinical education and, at the same time, promote ideas of access to justice and accessibility of legal assistance as more students will be involved in law clinics work.

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