

# MIZZOU

School of Law

## Veterans Clinic

Newsletter | September 2020



### A Word from the Director

Welcome to the first edition of The Veterans Clinic Newsletter. Students are back on campus at Mizzou and while COVID-19 has brought about many changes, we want to stay connected with our clinic alums, friends and clients. The staff at The Veterans Clinic came up with the idea to send out a bi-annual newsletter to stay in touch with those who have helped us along the way. I hope you enjoy reading this inaugural edition of The Veterans Clinic Newsletter.

On a personal level, and since this is the very first issue of our newsletter, I must start with a quick look back. I am humbled and amazed at how far The Veterans Clinic has come since that first semester in January of 2014 when seven brave law students (Scott Apking, Kristen Sanocki, Emily Fiore, Chris Dunn, Elisha Gilmore, Ellen Ferger and Liz Judy) committed to giving the clinic a try. Thanks to their early dedication, we firmly planted the seeds of a clinic which has now served more than 150 veterans directly, provided resources to hundreds more, secured well over four million dollars in benefits, and educated dozens of students in the clinic and hundreds of attorneys through CLEs – many of whom continue to help veterans to this day.

In the past six years, the clinic has grown in response to the need for veterans legal services. In 2018, Professor Brent Filbert joined us straight from the Navy JAG Corps, and with prior experience in “big law,” having served as a partner at Shook Hardy & Bacon, and Hughes Hubbard & Reed. Brent’s presence and leadership allow the clinic to reach new heights. We are now firmly entrenched on the national scene, helping law school clinics across the nation assist veterans, on behalf of a grateful nation. Brent has single handedly doubled our caseload, while launching our discharge upgrade practice area. He manages the clinic on a day to day basis, including our Tigers for Troops rural outreach program. Brent’s article in this edition describes how the clinic has continued its operations during COVID.

Sara O’Connor started in the clinic in February of 2019. Sara has her master’s degree in Public Affairs from MU’s Truman School. She is married to an Army combat veteran and they have a beautiful five-year-old daughter, who has brightened quite a few Zoom meetings recently. Prior to her time in Columbia, Sara was involved in nonprofit and government communications in Texas, Florida, and Georgia, where she developed a dedication to helping military families. In fact, I first met



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Sara when she was volunteering for Team RWB – a veterans organization in Columbia where former clinic student Paul Wade is a leader. Her professionalism is critical to our image: she makes sure all of our materials are clearly written, grammatically correct and appropriate to the task at hand. Her finishing touches inspire confidence in our clients, students and other stakeholders. Sara also manages all of our intake, so please take a moment to read her column to gain an understanding of the enormous need for our services.

Of course, no clinic can run without administrative support and we are lucky to welcome our newest staff member, Mary Austin, to the team! Mary previously retired as the Executive Athletics Director for Compliance at MU, but came out of retirement because she believes in the mission of the clinic. Mary is putting her extensive experience and impeccable organizational skills to great use. Mary Frerking also assists on the administrative side. She is the backbone of our calendaring system. A former attorney in Kansas City, Mary adds needed color commentary to our often very dry clinic business, and serves as the task master of our long list of responsibilities resulting from our incoming mail.

If you are receiving this email, it is because you have been there with the clinic on our journey – in the classroom, at a CLE, in a hearing room or by virtue of sending a donation. We appreciate your presence and look forward to keeping you up-to-date with our results and plans.

Very Truly Yours,

  
Angela K. Drake, Director



While the clinic spaces have not been open to the public, our students and staff have continued to work on existing VA disability compensation claims/appeals and discharge upgrade cases remotely during the emergency. Using several different communications, research, document storage and legal filing technologies, we really have not missed a beat and, in fact, have succeeded in winning several significant victories on behalf of veterans since the emergency began.

The clinic has also continued its outreach to veterans and veterans law attorneys to include conducting remote legal consultations with rural veterans and remotely hosting multiple national case rounds events attended by attorneys and law students from across the nation. Seamlessly adjusting to remote communications, cloud-based document technologies, and online classes, Clinic students have still been able to acquire the essential practical skills provided by working on cases pending before the VA, Department of Defense and Federal Appellate Courts. Over the past few months, clinic attorneys and students prepared and submitted numerous cutting-edge legal briefs to adjudicators on behalf of veterans. Now that the fall semester has begun, we have transitioned back into the clinic spaces, with students and staff back on campus for the fall semester. Under current university guidance, we continue to assist veterans and train law students through both remote and in-person class offerings.

*From Clinical Director Professor Brent Filbert*

I wanted to let The Veterans Clinic supporters know how The Veterans Clinic has adjusted during the COVID-19 emergency and also our strategic plans for the future. The good news is that the clinic has continued to fully function during the pandemic.

While the clinic has grown substantially over the last few years, we want to make sure that we are able to meet the needs of veterans and provide students the best training possible over the long term. To that end, we recently developed a Strategic Plan which sets forth the roadmap for the clinic to

## Continuing Operations under COVID-19

continue to thrive and expand over the next ten years. The ultimate goals of the clinic are two-fold: 1) never turn away an eligible veteran due to a lack of resources; and 2) establish the clinic as the nation's premier law school clinic for veterans. The plan describes in detail the staffing and programs necessary to achieve these strategic goals.

## Update: Tigers for Troops

Coronavirus has changed many plans – including some of the planned events for “Tigers for Troops.” Tigers for Troops is The Veterans Clinic’s outreach program designed to increase access to services for Missouri’s Rural Veterans. The original plan was conceived by student Lexie Deagen in the summer of 2018. Thus far, Tigers for Troops has served 62 Missouri counties, consulted with 82 veterans, welcomed 21 new Tigers for Troops clients to the clinic, placed 19 veterans with Tigers for Troops attorneys outside the clinic, and trained 256 lawyers in veterans benefits law through a total of nine Continuing Legal Education (CLE) events. We continue to adapt—in some cases postponing planned events and in other cases rising to the challenge of providing services under these unusual circumstances through the use of remote technology.

So far this summer, Tigers for Troops has held two very successful virtual outreach events in both Johnson and Dent counties, thanks to partnership with the Missouri Housing Development Commission, MU Extension and several local organizations in those areas. As future events are rescheduled or revised, The Veterans Clinic remains committed to providing resources to Missouri’s rural veterans.



## 2019-2020 Bailey Award Recipients

Each academic year, The Veterans Clinic honors two practicing attorneys with the Bailey Award, which recognizes compassionate, zealous and outstanding advocacy on behalf of veterans. The award is named for Dean Emeritus Bob Bailey. Bob, a veteran who served as an Army linguist during the Vietnam War, secured the initial funding for The Veterans Clinic and has helped raise money since the clinic’s inception. Truly, without him, there would be no Veterans Clinic. Bob also recruited the students who served in the first Veterans Clinic class in 2014 and played an instrumental role in bringing Professor Filbert to the clinic in 2018. This year’s recipients of the Bailey Award are Mary Moorkamp and Matthew Schelp. Both recipients are undergraduate and Mizzou Law alums.

Mary is the Chief Legal Officer for Schnucks Markets, Inc. In 2019, she spearheaded the effort to create a long-term and productive partnership between Schnucks and the clinic. Several members of her in-house staff, including Mary herself, attended a full-day veterans law training session at the Law School in May 2019. Due to Mary’s vision and commitment to helping veterans, Schnucks counsel now routinely represent veterans in disability compensation and discharge upgrade cases referred by the clinic.

Matt was a partner at Husch Blackwell where he led the firm’s Government Compliance, Investigations & Litigation practice group. He is now the newest Federal District Court Judge in Missouri. Matt is a veteran, having served for several years on active duty and in the reserves in the Navy JAG Corps. In 2019, Matt volunteered his time to set up a firm-wide veterans law CLE hosted by The Veterans Clinic. This event led to the creation of a stable of Husch attorneys who are trained and willing to represent veterans in cases referred by the clinic. Matt himself has represented veterans in discharge upgrade and military decoration cases. He was sworn in as a United States Federal District Court Judge in August of this year.

## 2019-2020 King Award Recipients



*Ryan Bert and Justin Brickey*

The Veterans Clinic is pleased to announce this year's winners of the King Award. The award is given to the most outstanding student in the clinic each semester (Summer/Fall and Spring Clinics). It is based on the quality of work, attitude, overall effort and contributions to the clinic. The award is named for Amy King. She was the very first staff member at the clinic and due in large part to her amazing efforts over several years the clinic grew into one of the premier law school veterans clinics in the nation.

The awardee for the Summer/Fall 2019 semesters is Justin Brickey. Justin completed his 2L year in May. He serves in the Army reserves and has deployed to Iraq and other locations during his military career. Not only was Justin an outstanding student in the clinic, he continues to work in the clinic as a part time research assistant. He was hand-picked to work exclusively with highly successful trial attorney Jerry Wolf of Denton's law firm on several cutting-edge veterans law cases. Justin also excelled in preparing briefs in federal appellate cases.

The winner for the Spring 2020 semester is Ryan Bert. He also just completed his 2L year and is an Air Force veteran. Ryan performed at an exceptionally high level during his time in the clinic, taking on several difficult disability compensation cases. One of his most notable accomplishments was researching and preparing two outstanding briefs on Agent Orange exposure in Thailand during the Vietnam War. Congratulations Justin and Ryan!

## Dispatch from the Intake Desk

From the time I started with the clinic, I have overseen more than 50 client intakes, including many veterans through the Tigers for Troops program. Our client list has grown significantly since the clinic's creation and I am honored to be a part of each new client's experience.

Beginning in the middle of March, I, along with the rest of The Veterans Clinic team, started working from home, which I still do a few days a week. Leaving the office does not mean leaving my responsibilities, though. As our Intake Coordinator, I continue to speak with veterans and family members on a near-daily basis about their challenges in finding assistance with benefits. During this difficult time, I refer veterans to the appropriate outside resources wherever possible. For example, many veterans can start a claim with a Veterans Service Officer, and I can help them locate one in each county through our connections with Missouri Veterans Commission. If their claim is then denied, they can reach back out to us for assistance appealing that decision.

We have taken on a few new clients during the past few months, veterans or family members who have extremely urgent issues which cannot wait. This is far fewer new clients than we would accept under normal circumstances. Other veterans, were asked to contact us at the start of the fall semester, as we welcome a new roster of students to assist us. Resources are always a concern for our Clinic and, Coronavirus or not, it is part of my job to help monitor capacity and accept new cases as we are able, ensuring our ability to fulfill our duties to our existing clients. In a world of uncertainty, we want our clients and any other veteran in need to know that The Veterans Clinic is still operating and focused on our mission.

Sincerely,

Sara O'Connor

Support Specialist at The Veterans Clinic