



Description

The Northern California Innocence Project (NCIP) is a law school clinical program that provides a unique educational opportunity for law students to investigate and help litigate possible wrongful convictions, and to promote legal reforms to address and remedy systemic problems within our criminal justice system. Supervised by experienced attorneys, NCIP clinic students evaluate innocence claims by reviewing case histories, appellate briefs, transcripts, and other records. They participate in the investigation process by interviewing incarcerated people, witnesses, crime lab personnel, law enforcement, defense attorneys, and prosecutors. As part of their case work, NCIP students draft legal documents including motions, declarations, briefs, legal memoranda, and letters to attorneys, clients, and case rounds memos. Students also attend and participate in court proceedings.

Credit

NCIP is a year-long, two semester program (Fall and Spring semesters), available to 2L and 3L students. Students enroll for at least three units of academic credit per semester. For each unit of credit, a student is responsible for 50 hours of participation, including case work and class attendance. In order to enroll in the NCIP clinic, students must submit an application by 5pm, April 2, 2021 and be accepted into the program. Applications are available on the NCIP website (www.ncip.org/educate) beginning March 1, 2021. Applicants may be interviewed and/or asked to complete a short writing exercise. Once you are accepted into the Clinic you will be given instructions as to how to enroll.

Because NCIP is a year-long course, no grade will be awarded until the end of the second semester. NCIP meets the Professional Skills Requirement and is a Public Interest and Social Justice Law Certificate course. Students can take a maximum of 6 units of graded credit from any combination of NCIP course participation. Any additional units will be graded on a Credit/No Credit basis only.

Training and Education

All NCIP students are required to attend an intensive two-day training session known as “NCIP Boot Camp” near the beginning of the fall semester. Students will be assigned to work closely with one or more lead attorneys on designated cases. Students will be expected to be in the NCIP office, working on cases, at least ten hours per week on a schedule to be agreed upon in advance with the supervising attorneys. NCIP students will participate in meetings and seminars to discuss readings and presentations on post-conviction law and issues relevant to wrongful conviction and to the racial inequality that pervades our criminal justice system. Class topics include federal and state habeas corpus procedures, post-conviction DNA testing, investigation techniques, witness interview strategies, the science of DNA testing, and the causes and possible remedies for wrongful convictions. Each topic will center discussion and include readings on the ways that racial inequality is perpetuated by the existing system and alternatives. The NCIP experience is one of intensive casework and training. NCIP clinic students are considered junior staff on current cases and are expected to work with the same commitment and level of professionalism that they would in a law firm or government office.

Advanced Practice Clinic

Students who have completed the one-year NCIP course are encouraged to enroll in Advanced NCIP which provides the opportunity for them to continue to advance their individual cases and to research and discuss in-depth the specific issues relevant to promising cases. Advanced NCIP is available every semester, including summer. Participation requires faculty approval.



1) Become part of the new civil rights movement to reform our criminal legal system.

Since 1989, more than 2,700 wrongfully convicted people have been freed from prisons in the United States through the work of law students, journalists, public defenders, and others. Of those exonerated, at least 170 had been on death row. No one knows how many innocent people have already been executed. By enrolling in the Northern California Innocence Project (NCIP) you become directly involved in working to free the innocent and become part of a nationwide effort to address racial inequality and reform the injustices within our system.

2) Gain experience you cannot get at other law schools.

NCIP is one of only three innocence projects in California. No other law school in Northern California, and few other law schools in the country, can offer you the experience of working directly with attorneys and forensic experts to free wrongfully convicted prisoners. This could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to participate in the process by which an innocent person is freed.

3) Put your legal knowledge to direct practical use.

Working at NCIP offers an opportunity to enhance the skills and knowledge you have learned in your other classes. You will discover that the rules of evidence and the complexities of criminal procedure become infinitely more accessible when applied to actual cases. And you will find that your legal research and writing skills improve as you draft motions and write letters regarding real issues in real cases for actual clients.

4) Gain new insights into criminal law, criminal procedure, and the post-conviction process.

Much of NCIP's work involves identifying cases with viable claims of innocence and legal avenues for relief, such as post-conviction DNA testing. Advancing these cases provides an opportunity to develop an in-depth knowledge of evidence, criminal law, criminal procedure, and post-conviction relief, in ways taught in no other class.

5) Work directly with clients, attorneys, witnesses, and experts.

Our clients are real people in complex, nightmarish situations. Through your interactions with criminalists, forensic experts, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and witnesses, you will learn about the criminal justice system and how to remedy existing inequities. And you will have the opportunity to enrich your life with the experience of working with such a diverse group of people. If you wish to enroll, you must apply by 5 p.m., April 2, 2021. If accepted, you may obtain a permission number from Clinical Professor of Law, Linda Starr at lstarr@scu.edu and use it to enroll during your scheduled registration period. For more information, please see our website at www.ncip.org.