Native American Law Center

The Native American Law Center is dedicated to scholarship, public service, and education in the field of Indian law. The center promotes the development of Indian law and encourages Native Americans and others with an interest in Indian law to attend law school. The center works closely with other programs at the Law School, which include environmental and natural resources law, health law, and the Asian Law Center.

Objectives

- Strengthen tribal institutions and their relationships with local, state and federal governments
- Promote scholarship and the progressive development of federal Indian law
- Assist tribes with juvenile justice reform efforts
- Offer public defense support to tribes
- Promote new institutions for intergovernmental cooperation
- Offer mediation services for environmental challenges, including Indian treaty rights
- Facilitate resolution of tribal/state and local conflicts
- Achieve fulfillment of Indian treaty fishing and hunting rights
- Provide consultation to tribal institutions, students, and local and federal governments on contemporary Indian law issues
- Examine legal and ethical issues related to genetic research among American Indian and Alaska Native communities
- Assist tribes with the development of research regulatory systems

Established in 1999, the Native American Law Center serves as a resource for Indian tribes, Indian law specialists, students, and others with an interest in Native American legal issues.

The center is regularly contacted for advice on Indian law matters by federal, state and tribal leaders. With 29 Indian tribes in Washington State and another 229 in Alaska, center faculty consult on many issues of regional and national importance. Substantive projects include tribal court development training; Indian water rights mediation; Alaska Native sovereignty and subsistence issues; tribal research regulation; model tribal youth code development; and remote public defense support. The center also provides primary public defense services to the Tulalip, Squaxin Island, Sauk Suiattle, and Skokomish Tribes.

Law students have the opportunity to be involved in the work of the center, and may work on substantive Indian law projects for academic credit.
Clinical Law Program
In partnership with the Tulalip Tribes, the center operates the only dedicated Tribal Court Public Defense Clinic in the U.S. Through this program, UW law students, working under the supervision of clinic faculty, provide direct representation for criminal defendants in tribal court. Students study Indian, tribal, and criminal law, and learn to competently handle all aspects of representation, including client relations, case management, legal analysis, and advocacy.

A central purpose of the clinic is to expand students’ knowledge of pluralistic court systems and alternative approaches to criminal law. Each spring, clinic students have the opportunity to visit the Navajo Nation and learn about Navajo efforts to create a justice system which reflects the core cultural values of the Navajo people while operating effectively in the modern era.

During the 2010-2011 year, sixteen UW law students practiced in tribal court through the program, developing their practice skills and gaining valuable cross-cultural experience, while providing a much needed public service. In conjunction with the Asian Law Center, clinic faculty also provide training to Afghan law professors seeking to establish clinical law programs in Afghanistan.

Indian Law Symposium
Since 1987, the center has sponsored an annual symposium on cutting-edge issues in the field of Indian law. Symposium programs are designed to benefit attorneys who practice in the area of Indian law and others with a strong interest in current Indian law issues.

Funding Priorities
The center is funded entirely by private sources. To ensure the highest quality of scholarship, and the best possible outreach, and effective development of tribal resources, the center has identified the following funding priorities:

- Formal training for tribal court practitioners including tribal advocates, public defenders, and prosecutors
- A permanently funded tribal court public defense resource program
- Expansion of scholarship assistance to recruit and retain Native American students
- Further development of Indian law course offerings
- Expansion of interdisciplinary courses related to tribal courts and pluralistic approaches to justice systems
- Cultural competency through the inclusion of cross-cultural experiences within legal education

Faculty
Robert Anderson, Native American Law Center Director, Associate Professor of Law
Ron Whitener, Tribal Court Public Defense Clinic Director, Assistant Professor of Law
William Rodgers, Stimson Bullitt Professor of Law
Molly Cohan, Supervising Attorney and Lecturer
Brenda Williams, Supervising Attorney and Lecturer