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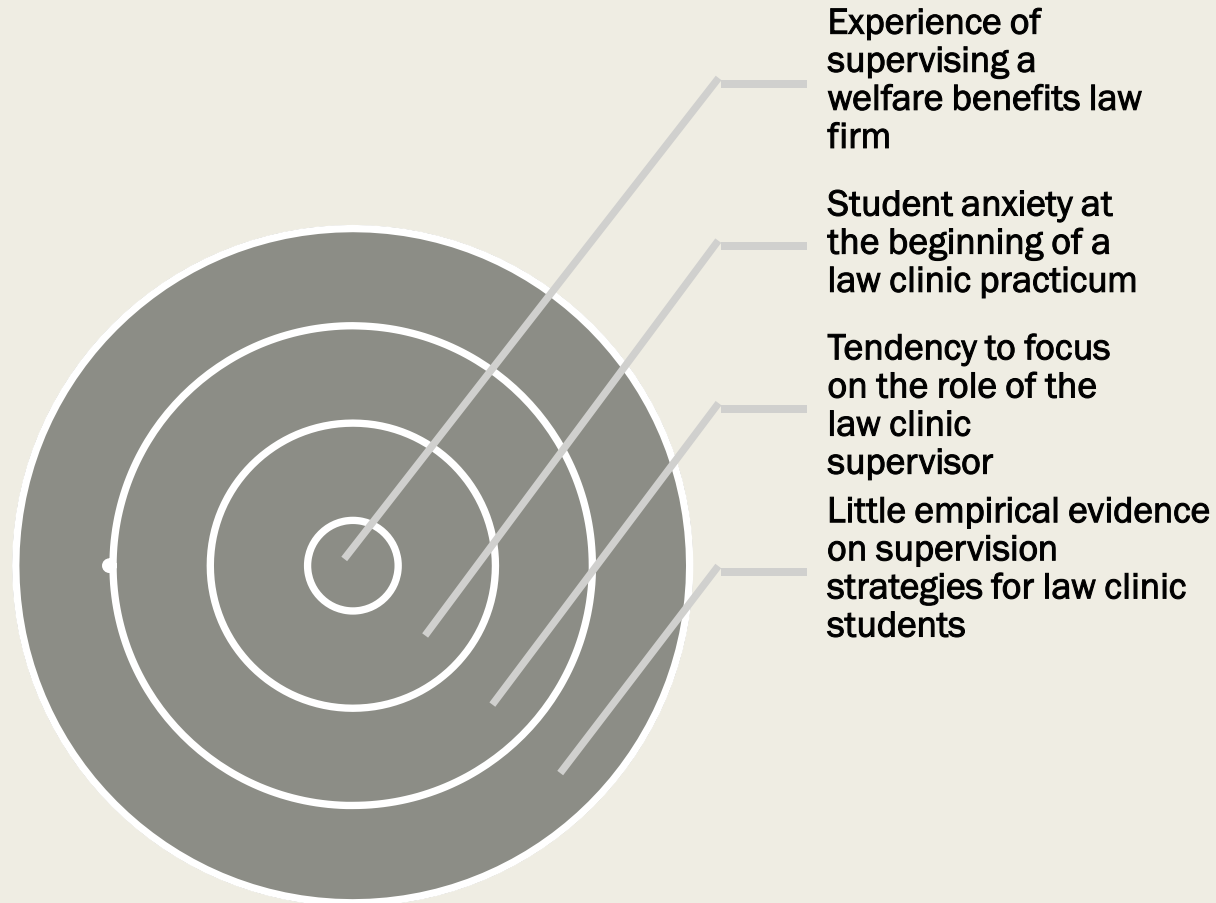
Monash University



Strategies for Law Clinic Students: Preparing for and getting the most out of law clinic supervision

Supervision of clinic students is at the core of a clinical pedagogy. Law clinic supervision can be a challenging and dispiriting enterprise for law clinic students. One way of mitigating the impact of supervision is through the education of the clinic student. This paper provides information for embracing the possibilities and avoiding the difficulties of receiving clinic supervision. Using the author's experience of supervising a welfare benefits law firm, supervision principles and practices as a backdrop, this paper presents practical strategies for students preparing for clinic supervision.

Why strategies for law clinic students?



Law clinic supervision

- Recognised as a speciality in its own right?
- What is it?
 - ... *requirement for clinicians to receive specialised training in clinic supervision?*
 - ... *an extension of the previous/current years of legal practice?*
- Wide variability of styles and quality
 - ... *students comparing firms*
- Impact on students' emotional wellbeing and mental health needs
 - ... *mitigate the impact by educating and preparing clinic students for supervision*

Scholarship on strategies for law clinic students

- Clinical scholarship on strategies for clinic students is sparse
- Few authors emphasise the importance of preparation for law clinic:
 - ... *practical guidance on interviewing, legal research, advocacy and presentations* (Kevin Kerrigan and Victoria Murray - *A Student Guide to Clinical Legal Education and Pro Bono* (2011))
- Still lacking on empirical evidence on personal skills
 - ... *behaviours/attributes/qualities*
- Learning how to be supervised involves exposure to the fundamentals of providing law clinic supervision

Dialogical reflexivity in law clinic supervision

- Question our way of doing things
 - ... *know our roles and the stages of clinic supervision*
- Focus not only on knowledge, skills and attitude values
 - ... *competency approach to supervision must also focus on relational competencies*
 - ... *a supervisory relationship develops relational competencies*
 - ... *operationalise the supervisory relationship as a transformational learning forum*
- Clinic supervisor/supervisee become aware of problems that can arise

Targeted audience

- Law clinic supervisors
- Law clinic students entering their first clinical legal education practicum
- Using foundational supervision principles to empower clinic students to:
 - ... *prepare for the law clinic supervision experience*
 - ... *inaugurate the law clinic supervision relationship*
 - ... *participate in law clinic supervision*

1. Preparing for the law clinic supervision experience [welfare benefits law firm]

- Over-generalised beliefs about individuals encourage prejudice
- ... *what are your views on the welfare benefits system in the United Kingdom?*
- ... *what are your views on benefits claimants?*
- ... *why do you hold these views?*
- ... *do you think any of these views involve stereotypes?*
- ... *do you see any problems to using stereotypes?*
- ... *do you see any advantages to stereotypes?*
- ... *do you think stereotypical views help or hinder the role of a Lawyer?*

1(a). Law clinic student attributes

- Qualities conducive to the successful use of clinic supervision cannot be separated from qualities necessary to become an effective Lawyer
- Attributes for students in welfare benefits law firm include:
 - ... *resilience, psychological-mindedness and openness, interest and desire, motivation and initiative, enthusiasm and eagerness, dependability, interpersonal curiosity, empathy, intellectual openness, habit of developing professional knowledge, minimal defensiveness, introspection, receptivity to feedback, and personal, theoretical and clinical casework flexibility*
- Assessment of skills and knowledge is impacted by behaviour in supervision
- For me the most important supervisee behaviours include:
 - ... *willingness to grow and taking responsibility for consequences of own behaviour*
- What about for them?
- Survey what students think are the most important behaviours and attributes

1(b). Understanding the role of the law clinic supervisor

- Students entering the law clinic practicum for the first time may think that the clinic supervisor will just tell them what to do
 - ... *misconception!*
- As a clinic supervisor, I am:
 - ... *a law teacher*
 - ... *a legal consultant*
 - ... *a 'personal and psychological' counsellor?*

1(c). Understanding law clinic supervisor qualities and responsibilities

- Critical components of effective clinic supervision include:
 - ... *availability and approachability*
- Law clinic supervisors bear certain responsibilities which include:
 - ... *tracking and monitoring casework, providing regular and consistent feedback, offering suggestions for improvement, giving emotional support through reassurance and encouragement*
- Gathering preliminary information about law clinic supervisors can prepare students for what to expect

2. Inaugurating the law clinic supervision relationship

- First firm meeting sets the tone for supervision
- Attendance MUST be mandatory
- ... *law clinic student assesses supervisor*
- ... *law clinic supervisor forms an impression of the clinic student*
- Opportunity to:
 - ... *showcase desirable qualities for clinic casework*
 - ... *discuss assessment and expectations*
 - ... *unpack practical matters of the clinic*

3. Engaging and participating in law clinic supervision

- Welfare benefits law clinic supervision involves assessing:
 - ... *process skills, conceptualisation skills, personalisation skills and professional skills*
- Student's reflection and preparation are key aspects of law clinic supervision
- Active participation includes:
 - ... *agenda and welfare benefits law casework updates*
- Be prepared for the various supervisor roles coming into play
- Take initiative
 - ... *questions/student-role statements*

3(a). Anxiety and transference

- Anxiety is an inevitable part of clinic casework and sources of threat include:
 - ... *evaluation anxiety, performance anxiety, internal conflicts/personal problems, deficits in supervisory relation and fear of negative consequences*
- Transference
 - ... *root of confusing, difficult and negative interactions*
 - ... *potential for ineffective supervision and conflict*
- Student must engage in personal reflection
 - ... *influence of current and prior relationships on clinic expectations*
- Overly critical supervisor?
- Invest additional energy between supervision and running cases

What's next?

- ❖ Survey clinic supervisees to see what they would cite as the most important supervisee behaviour/attributes/qualities and then publish
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