

IMMIGRATION CLINIC 20 YEARS

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON** | LAW CENTER
Clinical Legal Education Program



UHLC IMMIGRATION CLINIC

Prepares students for the legal profession

University of Houston Law Center (UHLC) Immigration Clinic students are empowered to work on real cases as “student attorneys” while supervised and guided by clinic professors. These students are given the opportunity to provide comprehensive immigration legal services to those in need while developing practical and professional lawyering skills.

Altogether, this team of advisors, lecturers, mentors and students function as a law firm, offering pro bono representation to crime victims, abused and abandoned children, those fleeing civil war, genocide, extreme forms of domestic violence and repression, and many others.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Celebrating Immigration Clinic Milestones

In my 10 years as the Immigration Clinic director, I have seen our clinic grow and develop in many ways. We now have four licensed attorneys and help hundreds of immigrants on an annual basis with their cases, work authorizations, appeals, and in myriad ways.

This past year we participated in a variety of cases, including a Fifth Circuit appeal, BIA appeals, and numerous other types of cases, including asylum, crime victims, and Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) cases.

Our students and professors routinely do outreaches to the community and help people by providing Know Your Rights presentations among other services to the community. Our students consistently go on to serve immigrants and other communities, here in Houston, as well as throughout Texas, and the nation.

In September 2019 we held the Arrival Awards celebrating a major 20-year milestone for the Immigration Clinic.

As we enter our third decade, we continue to teach excellent, competent and ethical future immigration attorneys and see them achieve their goals and move into the legal profession.



Geoffrey Hoffman
Clinical Professor
Director, Immigration Clinic

ARRIVAL AWARDS

The Arrival Awards Gala recognizes immigrant achievement, inspires cross cultural understanding, and is a fundraiser for the UH Law Center Immigration Clinic.

Women wore pearls and long, fancy gowns. Men donned tailored suits. But they all filled a grand ballroom to celebrate and support an University of Houston Law Center program that serves the world's vulnerable populations.

Proceeds from the 20th Anniversary Arrivals Award Gala, held at the Hilton Houston Post Oak on September 26th, will help fund UHLC's Immigration Clinic, which mentors law students as they work asylum cases on behalf of victims of violence, human trafficking, and genocide.

"Right now it's a very difficult time for immigrants," said Geoffrey Hoffman, director of the Immigration Clinic. "Many people are facing dire circumstances, including family separation, families in detention, and people without representation. Families are being ripped apart. So clinics like ours are very crucial."

The gala featured international cuisine and live performances meant to evoke the immigrant experience, including live-art painting, ballet and opera performed by members of the Houston Ballet and Houston Grand Opera.

It recognized the achievement of three Houston activists — Sima Ladjevardian, originally from Iran, and a Houston attorney and senior advisor to the Beto O'Rourke presidential campaign; Harry Gee, a Chinese-American and managing partner of Gee & Zhang and president of Sister Cities of Houston; and Lynden Rose, who grew up in The Bahamas, earned undergraduate and law degrees at UH, and is the Honorary Consul of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas in Houston.



Sima Ladjevardian
Attorney,
Political
Strategist and
Senior Advisor
of Beto
Campaign

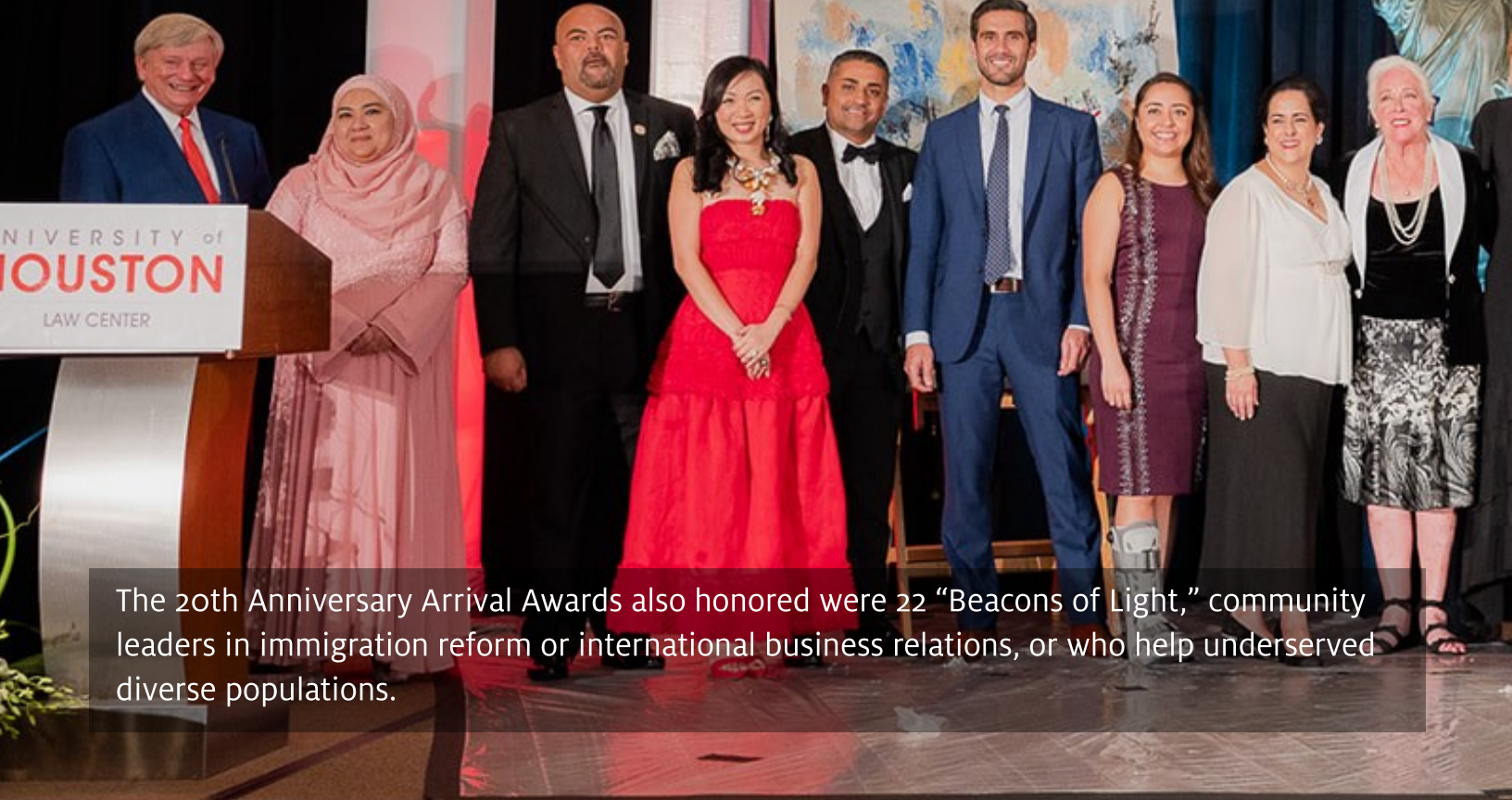


Harry Gee
Managing
partner, Gee &
Zhang, LLP
and President,
Sister Cities of
Houston



Lynden Rose
Honorary
Consul of the
Commonwealth
of The Bahamas
in Houston

BEACONS OF LIGHT



The 20th Anniversary Arrival Awards also honored were 22 “Beacons of Light,” community leaders in immigration reform or international business relations, or who help underserved diverse populations.

Farida Abjani
Antonio Arellano
Sandjia Bayot
David Cabello

Magali Suárez Candler
Chesley Choudhury
Ibrahim Firat
Sue Habib

Rusty Hardin
Aamir Kazmi
Bibi Khan
Connie Kwan-Wong



Dr. Himesh Lakhlani
Nathaniel Martinez
Susham Modi
Karla Perez

Ruby Lichte Powers
Anuj A. Shah
Sunil Sharma
Sebastian Simon

Elise Wilkinson
Dr. Behyar Zoghi

JOE VAIL WORKSHOP

Workshop provides attorneys with updates after “major sea change” in asylum cases

At the Joseph A. Vail Asylum Law Workshop held at the University of Houston Law Center, advocates learned new methods to help their clients after a recent Attorney General’s ruling significantly impacted asylum seekers who may have been victims of domestic violence. The keynote address was given by former Board of Immigration Appeals member Lory Rosenberg.

The symposium, hosted by the Immigration Clinic, a part of the Law Center’s Clinical Legal Education Program, focused on appellate advocacy for asylum seekers after the decision in the case of *Matter of A-B-* and other precedents. *Matter of A-B-* is a case that weakened the protections for asylum seekers fleeing domestic violence or gang violence.

“This is a tribute and testament to Judge Joseph A. Vail, who started the Law Center’s Immigration Clinic in 1999,” said Geoffrey Hoffman, director of the Immigration Clinic, who planned and coordinated the conference. “We made the

workshop very relevant to what’s been going on due to the recent changes in the entire landscape of immigration litigation.”

The first panel highlighted the importance of appellate advocacy. Hoffman was joined by Rosenberg and Magali Suarez Candler, partner and founder of Suarez Candler Law.

“One of the things that we need to remember is to plan,” Suarez Candler said. “When you go forward now at the immigration court, we really need to think that we need to go beyond the Board of Immigration Appeals. We need to be thinking ahead towards the Circuit Court of Appeals.”

“Generally discretionary decisions are not reviewable in the circuit courts,” Hoffman added. “There are some exceptions, with the main one being asylum. Even though asylum is a discretionary form of relief, you can still take a case like *Matter of A-B-* to the circuit court.”



The second panel featured Ruby Powers, partner and founder of Powers Law Group, P.C., Susham Modi, partner and founder of The Modi Law Firm, and Josephine Sorgwe, a clinical supervising attorney with the Immigration Clinic.

Sorgwe provided a primer on the basics of asylum law. “When we start talking about formal aspects of asylum law, that’s when we look to international law,” Sorgwe said. “The basis of U.S. asylum law is derived

from international law, specifically the U.N. Refugee Convention of 1951. When you look at our definition of a refugee, it’s very similar to the definition found in the U.N. Refugee Convention of 1951.”

“It’s super important to do this type of work,” Modi said. “There are a lot of excellent attorneys who will be happy to be a mentor to you, and a lot of asylum seekers cannot afford representation.”

LEGAL EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT ITS BEST

UH Law Center Immigration Clinic's two-year effort on asylum appeal in hands of 5th Circuit

Faculty and students of the University of Houston Law Center Immigration Clinic collaborated with two other university programs to represent a young woman and her son in an asylum case before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in New Orleans.

"The case involved a cutting-edge legal issue of asylum law: whether a litigant can clarify their particular social group on appeal," explained Clinical Professor Geoffrey Hoffman, director of the Immigration Clinic.

"The case may have wide-reaching implications for thousands of asylum applicants. Asylum is one of the most complicated areas of law and litigants need flexibility in articulating their social groups."

The Law Center clinic has been working on the appeal for two years in partnership with the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic and the Texas A&M Immigrant Rights Clinic. Hoffman, Clinical Lecturer Rosemary Vega, and two students, Vanessa Garza, 3L, and Bryan Perez, 2L, made final preparations at Tulane Law School the night before the oral argument which was conducted by Professor Fatma Marouf of Texas A&M. The court is not expected to issue its decision for several months.



COMMUNITY GIVING

Clinic empowers community members and leaders

The Immigration Clinic participated in over 30 outreaches last year. At these outreaches, we were able to help over 2,500 people in the community.

Clinic faculty and student attorneys were able to assist community members in completing naturalization applications for permanent residents, DACA applications for young people brought to the United States at an early age, and teach attorneys in Continuing Legal Education (CLE) courses.

We also trained judges, school leaders, and government employees on various resources for victims of crime.



2,500

People helped



30

Outreaches in 2019

GO BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: Apply to the Immigration Clinic

The UH Law Center Immigration Clinic offers law students an exciting opportunity to have hands-on, practical experience in the legal profession while still in law school. Students may begin taking the Immigration Clinic beginning their 2L year and even during the summer between 1L and 2L years.

For a pathway to the UHLC Clinics, visit law.uh.edu/clinic.

CLINIC CASES



Geoffrey Hoffman
Clinical Professor
Director, Immigration Clinic



Josephine Sorgwe
Supervising Attorney, Immigration Clinic



Rosemary Vega
Clinic Lecturer, Immigration Clinic

Victim on the path to citizenship thanks to work of Immigration Clinic

Under the supervision of Josephine Sorgwe, the Immigration Clinic was able to assist a Mexican citizen who was the victim of aggravated robbery with a deadly weapon. One night while exiting his car with his partner, the two were held at gunpoint and robbed. He assisted the police in the investigation of the crime, and due to this, the authorities were able to identify and arrest the suspects.

Following this event the Immigration Clinic represented the client in his U certification and U visa cases. The clinic attorney's were able to obtain a U certification for him from the Harris County District Attorney's Office. Just recently, he was approved for a U visa. This means that he will be able to live and work in the United States for four years. After three years, he will be eligible to apply for Adjustment of Status (i.e. a green card). Therefore, he has now been placed on a path to citizenship.

Asylum Granted: Client flees life of abuse

Clinic Lecturer, Rosemary Vega, represented, Ms. R, who sought to escape years of physical and psychological abuse. Her case began tragically, when for politically motivated reasons she was attacked with a machete and left for dead. Her family found her following the attack and rushed her to the hospital where she was able to recover from the assault.

Later in her life, Ms. R, was brutalized by her partner. He would beat and rape her, treating her as his property. He would also beat his own children and accuse them of not being his children. Ms. R tried to leave, but he kept finding her.

Ms. R suffered severe post-traumatic stress disorder, which affected her demeanor, memory and social impairment. Her scars from the machete attack are very visible and we were able to use a medical forensic doctor to write a report to discuss her scars and support her testimony. The student was able to do a day and half hearing on the merits on this case, direct examination of witness and make arguments to the court. The immigration court granted asylum.

Clinic preserves U. S. citizenship claim for daughter

The UHLC Immigration Clinic won a significant case involving a claim to U. S. citizenship through the client's father who had naturalized before the child's birth. The client has a son, 4 years old, who the clinic also represented.

When clinic attorneys went to immigration court for the first time they preserved the U. S. citizenship claim. The immigration court refused to terminate the case or to rule on the claim. Instead, the attorneys were instructed to file an application with USCIS for N-600, for a U. S. passport and seek an advisory opinion with Department of State. Unfortunately, the advisory opinion was not possible and the application for passport was denied. Therefore, the respondent was left with only the N-600 as a possibility to prove her citizenship.

Upon waiting several years for adjudication of the N-600, the father of the respondent died due to Alzheimer's disease and therefore was no longer available as a witness. In addition, the case was complicated by a Request for Evidence which sought additional information on the payment of support from the father, as well as further testimony from an expert on the law.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Immigration Clinic welcomes new supervising attorney

Towards the end of 2019, the Immigration Clinic welcomed its newest member, Parker Sheffy. Parker began as a Supervising Attorney in December and is already proving to be a valuable addition to the Program. His professional interests include economic mobility, identity, and the influence of law and policy thereon. It is through this lens that he first became interested in immigration law.

Parker comes to the Clinic from the St. Francis Cabrini Center in Houston, TX where he worked as a Fellow/Staff Attorney for two years providing representation to individuals with wide ranging immigration-based issues, including: asylum, special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS) family-based immigration issues, and inadmissibility waivers, among others. Parker earned his J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center in May 2017.

During law school, Parker served as a clerk in both chambers of the U.S. Congress. Parker completed his BA in Economics and History at UT Austin, and his MS at St. John's University in New York City.

Prior to law school, Parker taught at a public high school in the Bronx, NY, and worked as a community organizer in South East Houston.

"I am so excited to be a part of the UH Law Center and the Immigration Clinic. I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge of the law while working with students, including opportunities to represent individuals in federal court with the Clinic. I am already impressed by the UH faculty, staff, and students and can't wait to learn from them."

- Parker Sheffy



Parker Sheffy
Supervising Attorney, Immigration Clinic



University of Houston Law Center Clinical Professor Geoffrey Hoffman, center, addresses attendees at the 40th Annual South Florida American Immigration Lawyers Association Immigration Law Update.

Director Hoffman makes a difference on local and national level

Geoffrey Hoffman, Professor and Director of the Immigration Clinic, has been very active in 2019. In April, Hoffman was one of two professors to receive the 2018-19 Teaching Excellence Award, one of the highest distinctions bestowed by the university.

The award is given to “faculty who involve students in service to the community through service learning activities or community engagement projects related to courses that they teach demonstrating leadership in advancing students’ civic learning, fostering reciprocal community partnerships, building institutional commitments to service-learning and civic engagement, and other means of enhancing higher education’s contributions to the public good.”

Later in April, Hoffman, who practiced immigration law in Miami prior to joining the Law Center faculty, attended the 40th Annual South Florida American Immigration Lawyers Association Immigration Law Update conference. He participated in two panels, “If I Could Turn Back Time: The Cutting Edge in Motions to Reopen,” and as a discussion leader for “Walk This Way: Procedural Techniques.”

“I was honored to be a part of this national gathering in South Florida, where practitioners were informed about the most recent developments in our field,” Hoffman said. Later in the year, Hoffman accepted an appointment on the American Bar Association’s Commission on Immigration. Hoffman’s one-year term began in August at the 2019 Annual ABA Meeting in San Francisco.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Immigration Clinic student applies classroom knowledge to real cases



Paul Pierla
Immigration Clinic Student
UHLC Class of 2020

“I feel like my understanding of the practice and substance of immigration law has increased substantially. In the Immigration Clinic, I found the weekly classes very useful for learning new material and the professors were always willing ready to answer questions whenever they came up.

The practical aspects of working as an attorney, interviewing skills with regard to clients, spotting issues in applications, and new updates in immigration law were some of the topics I enjoyed the most. It was nice to see how some of what we learned in class was put into practice in the cases we were working on.

I found the classes and other meetings with the professors very helpful towards preparing me for future immigration practice.”

Immigration Clinic student turns emotions into concrete actions



Anna Steele
Immigration Clinic Student
UHLC Class of 2020

“Working in the Immigration Clinic this semester has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my academic career. I have learned things about myself that have surprised me.

Before entering the Immigration Clinic, I was unsure as to how I would handle the traumatic stories I would hear from clients. I was afraid I would not be able to separate myself from them emotionally and potentially unravel because of it.

Though I have been deeply moved and saddened by many of the things I have heard from my clients, I have been able to process them in a way that allows me to keep moving forward. I think what helps me is being able to channel those sympathetic and empathetic feelings into the concrete actions I take for my cases.

I feel as if I have used my emotions for something positive – for inspiration and motivation to do my best work on my cases.”

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