

IMMIGRATION CLINIC 2021



This photo was taken prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**
LAW CENTER

IMMIGRATION CLINIC 2020

Contents

DIRECTOR'S NOTE	3
SPRING 2020 – Case Highlights	4
SPRING 2020 – Case Highlights	5
FALL 2020 – Case Highlights	6
Student Highlights	7
Clinical Education During Global Pandemic	8
Immigration Clinic Impact 2020	10

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

GEOFFREY HOFFMAN
CLINICAL PROFESSOR

Director of Immigration Clinic

In 2020, the Immigration Clinic moved to work online and confronted numerous challenges of COVID-19 by taking client consultations, classes and outreaches online, via Zoom. We employed all the coronavirus protocols to keep faculty, staff, students and clients safe. Student attorneys and professors easily transitioned to social distancing in the middle of the spring semester, overcoming obstacles and counseling clients under the direct supervision of clinic attorneys without delay. Supervising attorneys diligently worked to provide assistance and guidance to our students despite the difficulties of not being able to meet in person. I am very proud of the hard work and perseverance of our students and attorneys; their actions are testament that the Clinic can prevail in achieving our goals by pulling together and working as team. In the final weeks of 2020, the Clinic, in tandem with a national law firm, filed an Emergency Application for Stay of Removal with the U.S. Supreme Court. That case shows the lengths we will go to protect our clients and achieve social justice.



Case Highlights



Chelsea Klump
Class of 2021



Chris Hammond
Class of 2021



Josephine Sorgwe
Clinical Supervising Attorney

Student attorneys, Chelsea Klump and Chris Hammond, and Clinic Professors Geoffrey Hoffman, Josephine Sorgwe and Parker Sheffy, assisted a man, subject to persecution in his country of origin, in his release from detention, his asylum claim and represented him before Department of Homeland Security and the immigration court. Upon attempting entry to the United States, the man was denied and required to wait in Mexico as a result of Customs and Border Protection's "metering" policy. Once allowed entry, both DHS and the immigration court required him to meet a higher standard than the law requires.

Accordingly, his requests were denied, and he was ordered to be

deported on an expedited basis. The Clinic, on his behalf, filed a petition for habeas corpus, and after a successful oral argument before the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of Texas, they achieved a stay of deportation, preventing the client's deportation.

The diligent work of student attorneys lead the government to apply the legally appropriate guidelines, ultimately empowering the man to be released from detention and enabling him to pursue the full range of options allowed by law. This case exemplifies teamwork and demonstrates the complexity of immigration law. Success required advocacy before private detention facilities, USCIS, Customs and Border Protection, ICE, the Immigration Court and U.S. federal courts.

Case Highlights



Oscar Oslewski
Class of 2020



Rosemary Vega
Clinical Lecturer

The Clinic represented an individual whose case centered around the intersection between immigration law and domestic violence. Ms. C, a Honduran national was in removal proceedings along with her two daughters, collectively facing deportation. At the same time, Ms. C was married to a Lawful Permanent Resident, a Cuban national, who violently abused Ms. C, both physically and emotionally. The abuse was so severe that when Ms. C discovered she was pregnant, her abusive husband attempted to force Ms. C to have an abortion against her wishes.

The severe abuse continued and ultimately caused Ms. C to lose the baby, as the baby was delivered stillborn. Through zealous advocacy, the Clinic was able to empower Ms. C to leave her abusive husband without fear of negative repercussions upon her immigration case or her ability to live within the U.S. lawfully. The Clinic represented Ms. C in connection with an adjustment of status application predicated on both the Cuban Adjustment Act and the Violence Against Women Act. As a result, Ms. C and her two daughters are now lawful permanent residents of the United States.

Case Highlights



Cassandra Zarate
Class of 2022



Parker Sheffey
Clinical Fellow, Supervising Attorney

Clinic student Cassandra Zarate successfully assisted representing a client obtain work authorization – overcoming changes in USCIS policy which would have precluded the client’s eligibility just days before the client would have otherwise been eligible to apply. USCIS proposed and implemented rule changes affecting employment authorization eligibility for asylum seekers, requiring asylum applicants to wait a full one year before becoming eligible for employment authorization – an increase in six months.

Understandably, waiting an additional six months before obtaining the mere ability to work lawfully to support oneself caused both an unexpected burden and enormous stress for asylum applicants, individuals whose lives are riddled with uncertainty and instability, who had expected to apply for work authorization six months after filing their asylum application. Following a federal court injunction of USCIS’s new, restrictive policy, the Clinic empowered the client to satisfy the additional evidentiary requirements for employment authorization. Within a month of filing, the client’s application was approved. Upon receiving the work permit, the client expressed that receiving work authorization gave them peace of mind and confidence in their daily life and as they continue pursuing their asylum claim.

Student Highlights



"The professors in the Immigration Clinic were most helpful. I learned early on the importance of confidentiality. In addition, I was able to work on a complex court case, among other matters, which involved a family seeking relief in the form of asylum. It was challenging but also satisfying to help the family with their case."

Houston Baker
Class of 2022



"I learned a lot about intakes in the Immigration Clinic. I also learned about the distinctions between the different agencies. The discussion in class was also super interesting and helpful. I have become better at sending follow up letters and keeping notes to clients."

Khyra Kolidakis
Class of 2020



"It is easy to become engrossed in the substance of the work in the Immigration Clinic. Just as important as building rapport with clients and convincing a judge is to keep meticulous notes in meetings and learning to keep a running record of pending and completed tasks so that nothing falls through the cracks. I learned to be more organized and it is reflected in my memos and meetings with my supervising attorneys. The professors were there for me and recognized when I needed help and guidance."

Erika McDonald
LLM candidate

Immigration Law and Clinical Education During a Global Pandemic

COVID-19 has greatly impacted both the practice of immigration law and how education is delivered.

As a result, the Clinic stringently confronted the dual challenges, working to best represent its clients while creatively empowering Clinic students with the knowledge, skills and passion essential of great immigration attorneys.

Recent changes to the practice of immigration law included postponed court hearings and new processes and requirements for filing documents with the immigration court and before DHS. Requirements for entire forms of relief were altered or all but foreclosed, even if only temporarily, at the professed justification of the coronavirus. Intending immigrants have been forced to wait outside the country due to the Migrant Protection Protocol, forcing them to remain in unsanitary conditions, at times, and miles away from cities such as Houston, where legal service providers, such as UHLC's Immigration Clinic, is located and offer pro bono representation. At the same time, staffing shortages and the effects of remote working have caused communication with government officers and opposing counsel to be challenging and less predictable.



Clinical Supervising Attorney, Parker Sheffy, in Matamoros in connection with clients in the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) program.

Immigration Law and Clinical Education During a Global Pandemic (continued)

From the educational perspective, Clinic lectures were conducted entirely on zoom – from the beginning to the end of the semester. Student-attorney meetings were transitioned online, as were attorney-client meetings. Without previous experience and the resulting list of unknown variables, the semester began with plenty of uncertainties. Will this be successful? Will students have access to the resources they need? Which processes need to be adjusted to satisfy the fact students will not have immediate access to physical files or the ability to simply pop into their supervising attorney's office unannounced?

Despite these numerous challenges, this past semester proved enormously successful. New cases were accepted. High-quality work was completed. And both students and professors alike expressed positive experiences. While the upcoming semester is similarly filled with unknowns, such as when a vaccine will allow in-person meetings and the possible changes from the forthcoming Biden Administration – the Clinic will build upon the success experienced in Fall 2020 to continue benefiting our students and clients alike.



Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) program

UHLC Immigration Clinic Impact

The Immigration Clinic continues to expand its impact – providing high-quality representation to as many individuals as possible. A snapshot of the Clinic’s caseload and community involvement in 2020 follows:

Total Open Cases:	222
Intakes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultations• Counsel and Advice• Pro Se Applications Support	129
Community Outreach, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CLEs led• Community Partnerships• Community Volunteering	48