

JOYCE ANN BROWN INNOCENCE CLINIC
UNT DALLAS COLLEGE OF LAW
July 1, 2025, REPORT
For period July 1, 2025 – January 31, 2026

Summary

Fall 2025 continued the operations for the Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic. The JABIC offices were open for student work with a limited percentage of office hours worked remotely are allowed. Fall enrollment was five (5) students enrolled and eight (8) students for the summer semester.

Our Experience

For the fall semester, we continued the team approach to selected cases. Students continued research on legal arguments, gathering factual information and exploration of potential expert witnesses. The team approach concentrates student resources on fewer cases but yields more in-depth analysis and development of legal claims. We find that the team approach encourages collaborative legal work and provides students opportunities to test theories and develop new case strategies. Students scheduled either in-person or phone visits with their major case clients. The reasoning was to create a connection between the students and the client. Visiting the client or speaking to the client on the phone makes the client's situation real. For the client, it signals that work is being done on their case,

In the summer session, generally students receive individual case assignments and will not work in teams. This shift allows students to further develop independent investigation and provide research. We want students to have the opportunity to take charge and determine the course and direction of the case.

To address the increasing accumulation of pending requests, beginning with the fall semester, we implemented the following steps:

- 1) Students enrolled in the JABIC for two semesters are assigned to respond to specific inmate letters, requesting materials and responses to specific follow-up questions.
- 2) for each assigned letter, the students contact the court of jurisdiction to obtain court records and transcripts, if not available on line;
- 3) for each assigned letter, the students download all available pleadings and court opinions;
- 4) faculty review the status of all pending matters and categorize those matters based upon the viability of additional investigation and possible legal theories.
- 5) during the weekly rounds' sessions, there are presentations on those inquiries for which follow-up materials and correspondence have been received to assess potential further action.

Pipeline work

For one semester, our innocence clinic partnered with an undergraduate student from the UNT Dallas, criminal law department. The student earned course credit by interning in the innocence clinic. She was assigned a case to review, investigate and attend the weekly case rounds with the law student class. It is our hope that the connection with the college will foster an interest in this work for the next generation.

10-year Anniversary of the program

This year the Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic will celebrate 10 years at UNT Dallas College of Law. Plans are under way for an event to commemorate this achievement.

Writs of Habeas Corpus

Student teams are concentrating efforts on cases that the JABIC has determined may receive a favorable result from filing a habeas motion. After several years of delay in DNA testing, results have finally been received and entered into to Codis. Cases involving abusive head trauma in infants have been prioritized due to recent decisions from the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. Students began collaborating with the appropriate Conviction Integrity Unit and plan to file an 11.07 Writ of Habeas Corpus. The teams work to develop legal strategies and to gather evidence to support the theories. We use the weekly supervisory meeting as a place to brainstorm, research and discuss case strategies. As the teams move further in the preparation of the materials, they will present their findings and tactics to the entire class during the weekly case rounds. The teams made positive strides for information and evidence by connecting with district attorney integrity units, district clerk offices and trial counsel.

Change of science in Abusive Head Trauma

JABIC has followed with great interest the *Ex parte* Roark because the case involves abusive trauma and focuses on the changing science. Students in the summer session are closely monitoring an abusive head trauma case that is now overseen by the Texas Attorney General. A number of the cases that we are investigating involve abusive head trauma. We tasked one JABIC student to conduct research and gather cases to create a resource file tracking the

evolution of this medical literature from shaken baby syndrome. This research file serves as a resource for other clinic students working on infant deaths involving head injuries.

Use of Funds

The provided funding is used in two ways: 1) contribution to salaries and 2) direct client expenses.

Contribution to salaries: supervision and management of the inquiries and investigations is conducted under the direct supervision of the Director and Assistant Director of Experiential Education. Funds are used to contribute ten percent (10%) and twenty percent (20%) respectively of those faculty members' salaries. This percentage contribution is less than the actual time expended by these faculty members on JABIC supervision and operations.

Additionally, \$10,000 of the funds are contributed to the salary of the legal assistant. This contribution allows the department to elevate an administrative assistant position to the more specialized and skilled position of legal assistant. The legal assistant's workload relative to JABIC exceeds the percentage contribution to the overall salary range.

The Director of Experiential Education regularly certifies the percentage allocation of workload for the Assistant Director to the JABIC.

Direct client expenses: during the review and investigation of claims specific expenses are encountered. Most commonly, the costs are associated with the acquisition of court transcripts, police records, and other documents. Expenses have also been

incurred relative to experts to assist in assessment of potential claims, including DNA testing and interrogation procedures.

The procedure for such client expenses is: 1) the assigned student discusses the rationale and purpose of the expenditure with either the Director or Assistant Director; 2) the student completes a “Request for Funds” form identifying the inquiry, the requested items, and the purpose of the request; 3) that form is submitted to either the Director or Assistant Director for approval; 4) that approval and information is forwarded to administrative support staff for processing, sometimes as reimbursements for expenses already paid or for issuance of a requisition. Items to be paid from the TIDC funds are identified for the administrative staff by either the Director or Assistant Director.

WORKLOAD REPORT

Total requests for assistance received	64
Requests for assistance based on claim of actual innocence	56
# of innocence claims screened	42
# of innocence claims closed after screening	33
# of innocence claims closed after investigation	12
# of innocence claims with legal remedy pursued	0
# of innocence claims with relief granted	0
# of innocence claims with relief denied	0
# of innocence claims under active investigation at end of period	69
# of innocence claims awaiting investigation at end of period	163
# of law students participating in the project	13
# of hours worked by law students	1954
# of students from other fields of study participating in project	1
# of hours worked by students from other fields of	150