

# Interdisciplinary Student Teams Enhance Student Experience and Work Product

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## 1. What:

Interdisciplinary student teams at the Barton Child Law & Policy Clinic work together to ensure safety, well-being and permanency for abused and court-involved children in Georgia.

- Law Students
- Social Work Students
- Public Health Students
- Theology Students
- Medical Students

## 2. Challenges

- Instructors sometimes struggle with developing appropriate projects or assignments that will utilize the skills and expertise of students from other disciplines.
- Extra expense and time recruiting, retaining, and evaluating student work from other disciplines.
- Inter-departmental collaboration and extra-university collaboration with outside academic institutions takes time and resources.
- Grading criteria varies among departments, schools, and universities.
- Academic calendars are not always in synch.

## 3. Students at Work:

Our public policy and legislative advocacy work includes writing policy briefs, white papers, impact statements, and fact sheets as well as legislative drafting and analysis. The Barton Clinic's policy and advocacy work is carried out by interdisciplinary teams working together under the direction of clinical instructors.

During the 2006 term of the Georgia General Assembly, law students drafted proposed amendments to legislation, researched state statutes, and testified before legislative committees. A master of social work student prepared a white paper analyzing proposed legislation on case load limits for childwelfare workers and researched best practices for the treatment of juvenile sex offenders. A master of public health student researched the prevalence of sexual activity among young teenagers and analyzed data to determine the number of youthful offenders prosecuted as adults in Georgia.



## 4. Benefits:

- Students learn from multiple perspectives.
- Students bring a wealth of knowledge to our clients.
- Students bring a host of different contacts and experts from their respective fields of study.
- Interdisciplinary interactions in clinic prepare students for successful professional relationships.
- Clinic work product significantly enhanced.
- Wider university is a source of students and expertise.

## 5. Benefits Exceed Challenges

- Students learn how to work with other professions by experiencing the terminology, ethics, thought processes, and perspectives of other disciplines.
- Students have the time and the freedom to question each other about different approaches, such as why professional ethics might cause a law student to reach a very different conclusion than a social work student based on the same facts and circumstances.
- Complex issues can get lost in the political process. The interdisciplinary team approach provides Georgia's policy makers with sound research with the cross-disciplinary expertise to appropriately address complex issues.