

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXIII, Number 112, 13 April 1989 — Law students to protest attempts to close clinic [ARTICLE]

# Law students to protest attempts to close clinic

By Sarah Haines

Columbia law school students will stage a “study-in” at the Law School today to protest alleged attempts to close the school’s AIDS Law Clinic.

The clinic allows upperclass law students to provide free legal services in discrimination cases involving people infected with AIDS or the HIV virus.

Protesters will occupy the first floor of the law school starting at 10 a.m. and will “study-in” outside Law School Dean Barbara Black’s office in the afternoon, according to a statement issued by Concerned Students for a Responsible Columbia (CSRC), an organization of students who participate in the clinic.

School administrators are attempting to close the clinic, which was formed in September, 1988, by declining to reappoint its advisor, Lecturer Mark Barnes, to the faculty, according to Matt Levine, third year law student and CSRC member.

“Mark was a driving force behind the AIDS Law Clinic from its inception and continues to act in a supervisory capacity,” Levine said.

“We have very good reason to believe that he [Barnes] will not be rehired because we know that the committee of the clinical faculty made seven recommendations, the first two of which are taken most seriously and Mark was not among them,” he added.

A final decision about Barnes’ position at the law school has not yet been made by the Appointments Committee, composed of Black and five law school professors, Levine stressed.

“The ultimate decision has not been made yet, but we feel that Dean Black has the ability to take control of the situation and make a real commitment to the AIDS clinic, neither of which she has done as yet,” Levine said.

The purpose of the study-in is to articulate the demands of the law students that Barnes be retained and that the future of the AIDS Law Clinic be assured, according to second year law student Ted Piccone.

“We’re dealing with probabilities at this point, but students have to put pressure now on the Appointments Committee,” Piccone said.

Over 350 law students, about one-third of the law school student body, have signed a petition in support of the CSRC position, according to CSRC member and third-year law student Maya Wiley.

CSRC members see the attack on the AIDS Law Clinic as a manifestation of the conservative attitude of certain administrators and faculty members, Wiley said.

“In all of our conversations with the

powers-that-be at this school, it's been very clear to us that the clinic is in jeopardy and that there is a prevailing attitude among the powers-that-be opposed to the clinical approach," Wiley said.

"We feel we're really struggling to hold our position as a clinic at the law school. Part of the beauty of clinics is that your clients generally cannot afford to pay for the legal services that you are providing, and that at the same time, the law student receives real lawyering experience. It's a definite trade-off, and both sides will suffer without it," Wiley added. Several faculty members see themselves as having a pedagogical role which is very theory-oriented and classroom-oriented. they don't see clinics as playing a role in the academic process," she added.

Students participating in the clinic currently receive academic credit for counseling and litigating on behalf of clients in AIDS-related cases, Wiley said.

"The law student is the counsel and the law student is the one in court conducting the cross-examinations. There is no other clinic at the law school which provides this type of valuable experience except for the Child Advocacy Clinic, and that involves family law, which is a very different process from what we're involved in," she said.

The clinic has served 24 clients this year and many more potential clients were turned away due to a shortage of available students, Levine said.

The students do not plan to block access to the law school building, but have not notified Black of their plans to conduct the study-in, Wiley said.