

## Creating future leaders

### Bliss helps clinical education take root in Thailand



Most summer trips to Thailand wind up at the beach rather than an inland university teaching about clinical legal education to undergraduate law students and their professors.

Not so for Lisa Radtke Bliss, associate clinical professor and co-director of the HeLP Legal Services Clinic,

who ventured to the country to support the development of clinical legal education.



“The longer I was in Thailand, the more deeply I understood that my work there was about helping the next generation of law students to become leaders in their communities and in their country, and that clinical legal education is the best vehicle for that,” Bliss says.

Bliss was the first visiting professor at Mae Fah Luang University School of Law in Chiang Rai province. She was posted there for six weeks through the Bridges Across Borders Southeast Asia Community Legal Education Initiative. The organization recruited international clinical legal education experts for placement at universities in

Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries, to mentor law professors, lecturers and students. Their role included providing assistance with experiential course design and implementation, and the development of curriculum and administrative practices for new law clinics.

“Extended placements allow more time for relationships to develop,” Bliss says. “By spending time working closely with my Thai colleagues, we gained a shared understanding of one another’s cultures, teaching goals and styles. This shared understanding helped us successfully collaborate on a number of experiential learning initiatives.

“Many methods used in clinical teaching are a departure from traditional Thai instruction, which was historically lecture based,” she says, adding many teachers not involved in clinical education consulted her about how to incorporate interactive methods into their classrooms as well.

In addition to assisting in the development of a work plan and scouting potential locations for new clinics, Bliss was also asked to support the redesign of a course called English for Lawyers.

Two sections of the large enrollment course were combined into one class so both sections could work directly with her. The course was redesigned to incorporate lawyering skills and social justice.

“You don’t think of using interactive teaching techniques with a group of 300 people, but we made it happen,” says Bliss, who used the large plenary sessions she attends at clinical legal education conferences as inspiration for interactive activities for the Thai students.

“We employed a number of different activities, including ‘think-pair-share,’ small group work in which students collaborated to develop statements about social justice, and free-writes.

“We also incorporated role plays, both by students and faculty visiting from other classes,” Bliss says. “We tried anything that would facilitate active learning and the practice of lawyering skills. We wanted to enable students to delve into legal terms and the principles of social justice with some context.

“My faculty collaborators were quite creative and open to experimenting with different approaches,” Bliss says. “Despite the class size, the exercises we used were successful, and the students enjoyed experiencing active learning, which was unfamiliar to them. Receiving such positive student feedback was satisfying, and motivated my Thai colleagues to pursue their goal of developing experiential education and creating clinical opportunities.

“Clinical legal education is evolving differently in Thailand than it has in the United States. However, law schools in both places share many of the same goals: to help students





develop confidence and skills, and to instill a sense of professionalism and value for social justice into their approach to a law career,” Bliss says. “Because Thailand is still a developing country, the growth of clinical legal education there will play an important role in creating future leaders of the legal profession.”

Bliss believes her experience in Thailand will positively impact her teaching at Georgia State.

“Clinicians often speak about clinical education as ‘practice in slow motion.’ By slowing the process of law practice down, we help students examine and master the skills we explore in our caseload,” she says. “In Thailand, I had to slow my planning, teaching, action and reflection down even more because of differences in language and culture. This process of slowing things down created a space for deep reflection for me as a teacher.

“Every teacher wants to be thoughtful, intentional, reflective, and easily understood,” Bliss says. “Being in Thailand helped me focus on those things as goals for every class, and I brought those goals back with me.”



Bliss, whose work in the Georgia State University HeLP Legal Services clinic involves interdisciplinary teaching, brought the notion of interdisciplinary collaboration to Mae Fah Luang University, where she was invited to give a special lecture on the value of interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

She also accompanied other lawyers from BABSEA CLE to Vietnam and presented on the value of interdisciplinary cooperation between lawyers and the medical profession at a workshop on the legal rights of people living with HIV held at Ho Chi Minh City University of Law. “Everyone hearing about how Georgia State University has developed the idea of inter-professional education and collaboration was very excited about the possibilities for replication of our model.”

Going forward, Mae Fah Luang University Faculty of Law is interested in collaborating more

with Georgia State, says Bliss, who, once her teaching was finished, shared her newfound knowledge of northern Thailand with her husband and 14-year-old daughter.



Bliss’s colleagues taught her to appreciate very spicy food and how to cook a famous Thai dish, pad thai. The Bliss family brought Frisbee discs to share with faculty and students at Mae Fah Luang and taught her colleagues about the game of ultimate.

Bliss’s daughter also spent time in northeastern Thailand participating in service projects.



~ Wendy Reiser Cromwell