# Visualizing Justice

Visualizing Justice, LAW/ART 360, is a 3-credit, interdisciplinary course that combines legal, art and design concepts to explore: (1) what are legal rights; (2) how do we communicate legal rights; (3) how do we navigate legal processes; (4) how can art and design inform how legal rights and legal information are conveyed, in order to empower people and make legal systems more accessible and navigable?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>College of Law</th>
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<tr>
<td>Associated courses</td>
<td>Visualizing Justice, LAW/ART 360 (undergraduate); Innovation for Justice: Law 672 (graduate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project initiated by</td>
<td>Stacy Butler, College of Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty and/or Advisor(s)</td>
<td>Stacey Butler, College of Law, &amp; Kelly Leslie, School of Art</td>
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<td>Community partner(s)</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
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<td>University partner(s)</td>
<td>College of Art</td>
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<td># of students reached each year</td>
<td>20-25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>College of Law, College of Fine Arts, and grant monies</td>
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Easier to Read: Combining Art and Law to Improve Access to Justice

By Kimi Eisele

Reading and making sense of legal processes of any kind is usually no cup of tea. It’s called “legalese” for a reason.

But what if legal information were easier to decipher? What if the design of legal forms considered everyday people (not lawyers) first?

Those are some of the central questions of one interdisciplinary class in the University of Arizona’s College of Law, where students in one interdisciplinary course work to make some of the community’s legal processes a little easier to navigate.

The course, Visualizing Justice, is team taught by Stacy Butler, professor of practice in the College of Law, and Kelly Leslie, associate professor and chair of the illustration and design program in the School of Art. It’s part of a larger program called Innovation for Justice, which exposes students to the justice gap and engages them in problem-solving in order to close it.

Dakota Nicole Worden, a studio art major, specializing in graphic design and illustration, signed up for Visualizing Justice in Spring 2018. Worden had previous experience in the community through a class called Clients in the Community, which worked for two different nonprofits in Tucson. She had also taken several courses with Leslie already and liked her teaching. The course, she said, “sounded like a good way to incorporate design work in a more real-world focus.”

Worden also liked the idea of translating “law jargon” into something that could be understood visually. “The way the process is written doesn’t make it any easier,” she said.

On the first day of class, Leslie showed students examples of eviction notices created by landlords and served on tenants. Most were poorly designed, hard to read, or just offensive. One memorable form was a bright orange piece of paper with a happy emoji man pointing his finger and saying “Guess who’s getting evicted? It’s you!”

“It wasn’t a very sensitive way to tell someone that,” Worden said. “It lacked humanity. How heartless do you have to be to put it in that format?”

Such design, she said, doesn’t consider an individual’s experience.
“The eviction process is difficult to understand for both tenant and renters,” said Leslie. “We are interested in how visual information and the design of that information can make the experience less difficult and hopefully more clear.”

Better Design for More Clarity

Worden said one of the class projects, redesigning the court’s eviction forms to be more user friendly and easier to understand, shifted the way she thought about design. “It definitely helped me learn how to go through those processes and determine what the essential aspect of text would be, and to convey that in a way that would be easier for people to understand.”

The experience also helped instill a little more empathy” in both her and classmates, she said. “It really helped to put you in that situation, so it’s not just ‘Oh shoot, I’m getting evicted.’ But it puts you in their shoes and this is the process you have to go through and it’s hard and confusing.

This idea of “putting yourself in their shoes” is a central tenet of design thinking, which has roots in visual arts and communication and is a core approach of the Innovation for Justice Program. “It tends to involve lots of different people in the process,” she said. “It’s hard to design in a bubble if you’re not inclusive at the get go. That’s just forcing ideas and expecting people to use them.”

The approach also allows art students to think of their work in the world more broadly than just “something I made,” Leslie said. “It’s important for design students to move beyond the design of products and deliverables. You’re designing an experience and a way of thinking. That takes a certain amount of investigation and research, which can be difficult for undergraduates to do in a 16-week course,” she said.

Fortunately, the Visualizing Justice class builds on work carried out in the fall semester, mostly by graduate students, in a course called Innovation for Justice. That class engages students more directly with community members as students use observation and interviews to research a legal issue, such as eviction or human trafficking, and prototype and test new strategies for targeting that issue. Research then informs the spring semester class.

Worden thinks it would be great if other classes at Arizona brought disciplines together to engage multiple areas of learning. One of her classmates, for instance, helped her fiancé, an engineering student, with the design of a poster presenting his research. “Incorporating the duality of different studies into one is really beneficial,” she said.

Serving Clients in Interdisciplinary and Holistic Ways

Butler said bringing together students of different disciplines is key to the work of Innovation for Justice Program. “No one has just a legal problem. People who need better access to justice experience legal issues in conjunction with other challenges, such as loss of housing, domestic violence or unemployment,” she said.

Unfortunately, lawyers don’t always have the time, capacity, or inclination to consider all the other factors. “So when you bring other professions and disciplines in you get a richer perspective,” she said. “And it slows the law students down from making legal assumptions.”

Shifting assumptions is, in part, what the Innovation for Justice Program is designed to do—for students, for lawyers, for community members—so that law can better serve people, Butler said.

Butler has long held a holistic vision for how the law can serve the community. As a law
student, she helped launch a program connecting volunteer lawyers with law students to assist clients living at or below the federal poverty guidelines. She went on to become a law clerk in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, an associate in a private firm, and then a law clerk for a district judge.

“There is a big demand for students who know how to use design to make court processes and legal processes more accessible.”

Working in federal court, Butler saw the ways inequity played out all the time. While there are myriad civil rights cases every day, “Eighty percent of Americans can’t afford lawyers,” she said. “The way the laws are set up, an attorney won’t take a civil rights case unless there are significant damages. People suffer civil rights injustices all the time, but there’s little incentive for attorneys to help them.”

In 2016, Butler launched a Tucson nonprofit called Step Up to Justice, to connect people to the civil legal services they needed via volunteer lawyers. When a mentor from law school, Sally Rider, encouraged Butler to teach an access to justice class to law students, she started looking around for similar courses at other schools, but couldn’t find any until 2017, just as her access to Justice course hit the Arizona roster.

“All of the sudden, law schools started creating spaces where law students could explore new ways to improve access to justice. There was this magical alignment, 10 schools started programs or courses with this new focus on innovation. There was this realization that our model doesn’t work. We’re not serving people,” Butler said.

The Innovation for Justice course was approved in early 2016 and came on the schedule in fall 2017. Based on design and systems thinking and community engagement, the course brought real-world issues to students in an effort to re-think how law serves people. Butler started getting attention and the university saw that the Access to Justice course could expand into a program.

“There is a big demand for students who know how to use design to make court processes and legal processes more accessible. Traditionally, our legal system is made by lawyers for lawyers.” Butler said. “It was this sense of, ‘Maybe we need to reexamine how our legal system operates.’”

Power in Partnerships

For Butler, partnering with other organizations has been key to the (i4J) program’s success. “If you want your students to talk to real people, sometimes you have to curate that experience for them. This is hard to do without partners.”

It helps that, as a Tucsonan, Butler has a lot of community connections and has built trust with partners. “I went to law school here and was active in the community for 16 years before I launched the i4J Program. I think I’ve earned the trust of our partners,” she says. “And I have an understanding of how busy they are, I understand that because I’ve been there.”

Students in Visualizing Justice interface with community through observation and guest lectures. To better understand eviction issues, for example, students observed eviction court processes and heard from an eviction judge who visited their classroom. The process of re-designing forms also involves community engagement. For the eviction work, students present their designs to organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Pima County One Stop, Primavera Services, and others.

Butler says graduate students in the fall course took their ideas and work product into the community for tenants themselves to review. “You can find evicted people everywhere—outside the main library, at the bus terminal, etcetera.”

This kind of sharing is critical to the work. But Butler is also careful about asking too
much of the community.

“I believe in the learning model for students, but I’m always really worried about taxing the community. I work really hard to make sure the products produced by the courses are useful and that people feel appreciated and listened to and that their voice shows up,” she said.

“Matthew Rein, who graduated in 2019 with a double major in law and political science, said participating in Innovation for Justices classes gave him the opportunity to “become 100% involved in real-world issues,” which made for much deeper learning.

“You can write as many papers as you want and tests and that’s great and you’re learning but until you’re able to put those skills into the world, it doesn’t mean as much. People’s lives are impacted here. This stuff matters. To be a part of that was instrumental in my learning,” Rein said.

Rein said he also learned how important it was to listen, “We want to speak our mind, being in an academic environment. But in order to really understand another’s issues and be able to offer them something, you have to listen. Especially if you come from a place of privilege or can’t empathize with what folks have gone through.”

Evaluating Students

In the Visualizing Justice class, students created one-page flyers simplifying tenants’ responsibilities under the Arizona Landlord-Tenant Act, then shared them with local social services. Many organizations began using the forms.

Students offered reflections on their own experience. Many said they hadn’t realized that design work could make such an impact.

In working for real-world and community-based clients, Leslie said, embracing failure as a significant part of the process is important. To receive critical feedback in conflict of intention forces students to work without specific goals, but rather to trust that the process will lead them to unexpected solutions. There is significance in committing to a semester-long project where they can’t change the subject matter.

Leslie said the Visualizing Justice course has also impacted the way she teaches her other courses. “I’m making sure my students have more of a voice in how we form the next project. I’m being more sensitive to how collaboration and inclusivity informs the progress of a class.”

Butler says she doesn’t have the capacity she wishes she had to evaluate the impact of these projects on the community. But she can see a shift in students that reinforce her sense of the value of engagement.

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