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Law, Health Policy & Disability Center: innovating, making a difference

By Ann Scholl Boyer*



On Iowa City's Melrose Avenue, not far down the street from the modern architectural lines of the Boyd Law Building, sits the Law, Health Policy & Disability Center, situated in an old, unassuming

psychology, and public health, says the center, "is a little jewel in the law school's crown," and has evolved from when he started it mainly as a research center in 1993. But during the past couple of years, the center has been extremely successful in receiving federal, state, and private

aimed at including the disabled in all aspects of American society.

Before coming to Iowa, Blanck was a senior fellow for the Annenberg Program, practiced law at the Washington, D.C., law firm of Covington & Burling, and served as a law clerk to the late Hon. Carl

two-story house. Inside there is a team of professionals, whose combined expertise may be invaluable to

breaking down barriers that impede the employment and lifestyle of people with disabilities across the country. Peter Blanck, UI professor of law,

Invigorated by grant money and a new Capitol Hill presence, the Law, Health Policy & Disability Center achieves milestones for Americans with disabilities

grants. Blanck says his "primary approach is that if a project is worth doing it's also worth approaching from a research and policy perspective that can be both rigorous and relevant."

The center now comprises five offices - at the College of Law; the Melrose Avenue building; on the UI's Oakdale Campus; in Adel, Iowa; and in Washington, D.C. Blanck's College of Law colleagues, Leonard Sandler, James Schmeling, and David Klein, help manage the center in their respective roles of co-director, associate director, and director of technology. The center's executive director, Michael Morris, also oversees the Washington, D.C., branch.

Blanck brings to the center an extensive background in disability law. He is a widely published author of some of the earliest and most comprehensive studies on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), has testified on the ADA before Congress, and is a member of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. Last February, Blanck was a guest of President and Mrs. Bush at a White House ceremony for the unveiling of the president's Freedom Initiative, a policy directive

McGowan of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Throughout his career, Blanck's guiding principle has been to facilitate research, discussion, and vision. "And then to get out of the way." He is quick to add, "I can help provide direction and leadership, but then, we've hired some of the best people I know to collaborate on the research and writing projects."

Schmeling is one of those people. A 1999 graduate of the College of Law, Schmeling began working for the center the same year. He explains that the center focuses on research, service, and education - all with the goal of helping people with disabilities gain better employment, improve working conditions, and secure higher wages.

Sandler notes that the center also gives Iowa taxpayers a great return.

"We're educating Iowa's lawyers, as well as our citizens with disabilities, and developing and improving the lives of our fellow Hawkeyes," he says, referencing The Great Plains Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center, an organization that assists disabled workers from across the Midwest. In collaboration with the Assistance Center, the Law Health Policy & Disability Center investigates and researches workers' questions about existing and pending

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IOWA WORKERS' COMPENSATION MEDIATIONS

HOPKINS & HUEBNER, P.C.

2700 Grand Ave.

Suite 111

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Davenport, IA 52806

(515) 244-0111

Fax: (515) 244-8935

Law, Health Policy & Disability Center: innovating, making a difference

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disability legislation. Through policy research and analysis, and through technical assistance to government agencies and to private companies, the team at the center extends its efforts nationally by working with the new, nationwide One-Stop Workforce Development Centers. Such centers were formerly known as unemployment offices until the 1998 passage of the Workforce Investment Act. The name change reflects a shift in orientation to one of greater inclusion of the disabled in public employment services.

A recently opened Washington, D.C., office headed by veteran attorney and disability policy advocate Michael Morris, that office offers great promise for future research, service and educational externship experiences for Iowa law students and other parts of the University of Iowa.

Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, the center will

help ensure Workforce Development Centers become accessible to the disabled. The center, itself a facilitator of long-distance, computer-based training courses through the World Wide Web, has nearly completed a U.S. Department of Education funded project that examines corporate culture and disability at a large U.S. information technology company. A separate \$1.5 million five-year grant through the DOE's National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation has enabled the center to further study ways to employ persons with disabilities in the information technology sector. Web design, computer programming, and other information technology fields are up-and-coming areas of employment for the disabled, according to center technology director Klein.

"There's nothing like the center that we're aware of in the country, certainly not within a law school," says

Blanck, adding the "unique shop" would not exist without the vision and support of College of Law Dean N. William Hines.

The center's future plans include developing a research, policy, and educational program at the Iowa City and Washington, D.C., offices, and continuing to diversify the research, educational, and service opportunities available that may benefit Iowa and the nation. For more information about the Law, Health Policy & Disability Center, visit www.its.uiowa.edu/law/index.htm.



**This article appears in the Fall/Winter 2001 issue of the Iowa Advocate. It has been edited and reprinted with permission. T. Ann Schall Boyer is a freelance writer from Cedar Rapids and has written other articles for the law school's magazine.*

2002 SUPREME COURT CALENDAR

The Supreme Court of Iowa will be in session the following dates in 2002:

January 14-18	July 8-12
February 18-22	August 26-30
March 25-29	September 30, October 1-4
April 29-30, May 1-3	November 4-8
June 3-7	December 9-13

Opinions of the Supreme Court will be filed at 8:15 a.m. on Wednesday or Thursday following each session week. A list of cases on which the Supreme Court is expected to rule will be filed at 8:30 a.m. on the day preceding each opinion filing day. Opinion filing days for 2002 are as follows:

January 24	July 17
February 27	September 5
April 3	October 9
May 8	November 14
June 12	December 18

Opinions and opinion summaries are available online at www.judicial.state.ia.us/decisions. Opinions and a summary of opinions filed also will be available in the Supreme Court Clerk's office for public inspection. Copies may be purchased from the clerk at 40 cents per page.

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3605 SW 29th Street

Des Moines, IA 50321

515.953.4498