Learning
In An Intimate Setting

Northern Illinois University College of Law offers students a unique opportunity to learn and interact in a more intimate collegial setting.

We pride ourselves on our close-knit academic community, which allows students more direct contact with faculty and classmates – building close personal and professional relationships that will last well beyond graduation and throughout their careers.

NIU Law students are given a core curriculum upon which they then have a good deal of autonomy to focus their J.D. degree. Our students select from a significant number of elective courses which enable them to customize their coursework – matched to their individual interests, while building an outstanding foundation for their long-term careers.

In addition, students may further personalize their curriculum with four J.D. certificate programs. Building on the strengths of our skills-based curriculum, we offer certificate programs in Business Law, Civil Advocacy, Criminal Practice, and International Law. These programs allow students to focus their legal education in specialized areas of the law, without losing the advantages of holistic legal training.
Lawyers must cultivate a unique sense of professional identity, often quite different from that of other professionals. They must recognize not only how to place their client’s interests above their own, but also manage the delicate balance between duty to client and duty to an increasingly complex system of justice.

Laurel Rigertas, Associate Professor of Law and a highly respected scholar on professionalism and legal ethics

Building your Path to Success

NIU Law prepares students for an ever-changing legal market.

In addition to certificate programs, NIU Law offers vigorous skills training programs by way of Moot Court and Mock Trial competitions, a series on professional ethics, and significant course offerings in trial advocacy and lawyering skills.

With the support of Cherilyn (NIU Law J.D. 1978) and Michael Murer, the NIU Law faculty designed and now offers a requisite lecture series on professionalism for all first-year law students. Students hear from legal scholars, experienced lawyers, and judges from across the nation on topics such as upholding attorney-client privilege, representing unpopular clients, and making difficult ethical decisions.

The legal clinics further reinforce NIU Law’s commitment to community engagement. Through such partnerships, the school has the opportunity to model to its law students the value of using one’s legal skills to meaningfully assist members of the community.

NIU Law also offers a wide array of legal externships in criminal, civil, and judicial settings.

Holistic Skills-Based Curriculum

NIU Law prides itself on its holistic approach to legal education, providing students with a comprehensive set of legal skills while encouraging their devotion to serving their communities.

Supporting this approach, we have recently added two new legal clinics to the school. The first focuses on legal issues that contribute to health problems in indigent populations and is located in Aurora, Illinois. The second new clinic focuses on helping individuals through the foreclosure process, and is located on the NIU Law campus in DeKalb, Illinois.

The two new clinics join our two existing clinics: the Civil Justice Clinic and the Juvenile Justice Clinic which are located at our Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic in Rockford, Illinois. The Giorgi clinic stands as a tribute to Zeke’s legislative efforts on behalf of young people and education, and his deep commitment to increasing the accessibility of legal support to the community.

Students participating in these clinics learn to be professionally responsible and reflective lawyers capable of quality representation in a diverse and changing world. They gather these skills while providing, under direct faculty supervision, high quality legal services to persons with otherwise limited access to legal representation.

The clinical experience is an invaluable experiential learning opportunity that helps prepare students to practice. Many of these students will be interested in foreclosure, housing or family law, and they can leverage the skills they have learned in these clinics when they are seeking employment – and throughout their careers.

Anita Ortiz Maddali, Director of Clinics & Assistant Professor of Law
Guiding Your Stride

The Faculty At NIU

The NIU Law community is enhanced by the rich diversity of our faculty - who hail from a variety of backgrounds, including academia, Big Law and corporate America - bringing a breadth of meaningful experiences to the classroom. The Princeton Review has regularly recognized our NIU Law faculty as one of the most diverse in the country.

The faculty and staff are committed to each student’s success. From the first days of orientation through (and beyond) graduation, we pride ourselves on our accessibility and mentorship – helping our students identify and achieve the critical thinking, problem solving, and ethical lawyering skills so essential to their long-term success.

“I came to NIU Law because of its strong public-service orientation. I feel it is a lawyer’s responsibility to give back to his community and I work to instill this value in my students, encouraging them to always make the time to give back. The practice of law is truly a calling and I’ve found that using your legal skills to benefit society makes it all worthwhile.”

Marc Falkoff, Associate Professor of Law and principal lawyer in the habeas representation of prisoners being held by the U.S. military at Guantánamo Bay

Nearly 40% of full-time faculty members are minorities

“A faculty nationally recognized for diversity

“NIU Law is a very collegial community both for its students and faculty. There is a familiar interaction between students and faculty that resonates in the small class sizes. It is a highly supportive environment where a win for a faculty member or a student is a success for the entire school.”

Yolanda M. King, Assistant Professor of Law
The Path To Public Service

NIU Law has consistently delivered graduates to the public forum – as nearly one-third of its graduates have followed careers as public defenders, prosecutors, and judges. In honor of its commitment to public service the school has been honored with an Excellence in Pro Bono and Public Service Award and was named as one of the National Jurist’s top 20 Law schools for public interest/government.

89 alumni, nearly one out of every forty, are judges.

“The practical applications that NIU Law stresses well-prepared me for the many hats I would wear – first as a practicing attorney and later as a judge. Beyond preparing its graduates for the real world, the school is incredibly invested in the success of its alumni, and is always reaching out to see what we are doing and how NIU can serve as a resource to its students. For example, Dean Rosato has established an NIU presence in Cook County by providing many opportunities for current students to meet and network with alumni judges and practitioners.”

Honorable Mark Lopez, Associate Judge, Domestic Relations, State of Illinois Circuit Court of Cook County (Class of 1983)

“Originally, I came to NIU Law because of its affordability, but as I was practicing for the bar exam – with other recent graduates from law schools throughout Chicago - it hit me how well-prepared I felt for what lay ahead of me in my legal career. My fellow judges tease me because there are so many NIU Law graduates who are Cook County Circuit Court judges – such a large percentage for such a small law school. I simply say, ‘That’s because you get a good legal education at NIU Law, and their graduates are as well-equipped for the bench as they are to practice.’”

Honorable Patricia Martin, Presiding Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County, Child Protection Division (Class of 1983), appointed in 2013 by President Barack Obama as a member of the Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities

The law school now boasts close to 90 NIU Law graduates who serve or who have served in the judiciary across the nation – which means, nearly one out of every 40 NIU Law graduates has become a judge.

“NIU Law nurtured my overall interest in working in the public sector, while also helping me target my particular interest in an alternative dispute resolution career. In my position, I have the opportunity to oversee the resolution of conflicts for individuals affected by the actions of a state government agency; beyond the classroom, my mediation skills were honed through student organizations such as the Alternative Dispute Resolution Society (which I co-founded with one of my classmates), and through externships and mediation competitions, which exposed me to alternatives to traditional litigation.”


Leveraging Our Graduates to Guide Our Students

From the corporate boardroom to the courtroom, from the bench to the halls of academia, NIU Law graduates can be found in all fields of legal practice and working all across the country.

Over 3,900 graduates strong and still growing after 30 years, our alums are regularly found talking to our students about their careers, about mentorship opportunities, or just catching up with classmates at one of the many alumni-based events and social gatherings – as our graduates help us guide and pave the way for the next generation.
Career Opportunities
And Fulfillment

Throughout their NIU Law experience, students are supported by a highly committed and tenacious Career Opportunities Office. They receive personal coaching on resume and cover letter writing, interviewing, networking and career development. They also receive a weekly “Career Corner” bulletin with information about upcoming networking events, job postings, and insightful career tips. Because of our community’s small, intimate size, our Career Opportunities Office is designed and well-equipped to work individually with all of our students to maximize their success in building rewarding legal careers.

NIU Law students may participate in any or all of our mentoring programs from the moment they enroll. And nearly all of our first-year students are paired with alumni mentors. Our Career Opportunities Office has also partnered with the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism to develop a Lawyer-to-Lawyer mentoring program for alumni attorneys and has just recently launched a number of pro bono initiatives that allow lawyers to mentor students while serving the public good.

Though a majority of our graduates enter private practice, NIU Law has developed a growing legacy as a public interest law school. Our Career Opportunities Office has successfully counseled and placed an increasingly large number of Assistant State’s Attorneys and Public Defenders – supporting our 2012 accolade from National Jurist magazine, ranking NIU Law as one of the nation’s Top 20 Law Schools for Public Interest/Government.

Our Global Reach

Although a small law school with a strong regional presence, NIU Law offers opportunities for its students and faculty to engage globally. NIU Law students have the opportunity to participate in the school’s study-abroad program at the University of Bordeaux-Montesquieu in Agen, France. Through this program students learn about the civil law system and the legal system of the European Union through integrated, dynamic classes taught by NIU Law faculty and European lawyers. Each year NIU Law hosts students from the University of Bordeaux-Montesquieu who receive an introduction to the law and legal institutions in the U.S.

NIU Law students also have the opportunity to play a part in advancing the objectives of the “Women on the Border” program. Led by Professor Elvia Arriola, this non-profit organization is dedicated to advancing the impact of NAFTA on women in the global factories at the U.S. Mexican border.

NIU Law has recently entered into an academic agreement with Chosun University School of Law in Gwangju, South Korea that fosters academic exchanges between their faculties. Through this agreement, Chosun has sent visiting faculty to spend time at NIU Law. Similarly, the faculty from NIU Law has been invited to the Legal Studies Institute at Chosun University to participate in international symposiums on evidence law in criminal proceedings, environmental law, and corporate law.

Nationally recognized as a top law school for public interest and government attorneys

"NIU Law’s academic agreements with international law schools present the opportunity for faculty from different legal systems and cultures to exchange ideas about our respective legal systems. This broadens the ability of faculty to prepare our students for the practice of law in today’s world, with ever increasing international implications in the global marketplace.”

David Taylor, Distinguished Teaching Professor

A unique summer abroad program in France
Student Life, Profiles In Success

NIU Law offers students a variety of student-led organizations designed to supplement their legal coursework and develop their professional identities and leadership strengths.

From the American Constitution Society, to the Public Interest Law Society; and from the Women’s Law Caucus to the Black Law Student Association, these student groups provide excellent opportunities for students to become more involved in their law school community, to connect with multiple real-world life experiences, and provide diverse, meaningful networking opportunities.

Every law student is an automatic member of the Student Bar Association which serves as the “umbrella organization” of the law school, allocating funding to support the work of the school’s other student-led organizations.

At NIU Law, student-led organizations raise awareness; encourage discussion and fuel open communication around legal topics of particular interest for our students. They also provide support for students who identify with a certain culture, race or gender. The organizations create dialogues on important issues while encouraging culture sharing from the discussions in open meetings. The Women’s Law Caucus, for example, works to advance the position of women in the law school, legal profession and society at large, and provide them with career and academic resources.

Representative Sampling of Student-Led Organizations for Academic Year 2013-2014

- American Constitution Society (ACS)
- Black Law Student Association (BLSA)
- Christian Legal Society (CLS)
- Criminal Law Society
- Delta Theta Phi (Delta)
- Federalist Society
- Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)
- International Law Society (ILS)
- Juvenile Interest Law Society (JILS)
- Latino/a Law Student Association (LLSA)
- Phi Alpha Delta (PAD)
- Public Interest Law Society (PILS)
- Women’s Law Caucus (WLC)
- Entertainment & Sports Law Society (ESLS)

"As an undergraduate at the University of Illinois, I attended a moot court competition at NIU Law which would end up helping me choose my law school. The NIU team was so well prepared at this event that they could have been practicing attorneys instead of law students. I knew then that NIU Law was the place for me and as I prepare to graduate, I still can’t see myself anywhere else.”

Darrick Harris, President, Delta Theta Phi (Class of 2014)
The only public law school in the greater Chicagoland area...

A Tranquil College Town with Big City Ties

NIU Law is in DeKalb, a community located only an hour west of Chicago. DeKalb is close enough to the Chicago metropolitan area to draw on the city’s many resources, yet retain a small college town feel.

DeKalb is a safe and affordable environment with a high quality of life. The university’s main campus is set on 755 acres of rolling countryside, featuring two lagoons, several museums, and a broad variety of cultural opportunities. Residing near the heart of the relatively large Northern Illinois University, even with all of the expected state campus activities and opportunities, the College of Law stands as an oasis – providing an excellent, quiet environment for the study of law.

In addition, given the school’s comfortable proximity to Chicago, one of the nation’s largest legal markets, many students capitalize on the opportunities such proximity affords. During their second and third years, students engage in a rich variety of legal externships, internships, and paid professional positions with both private and government employers in and around the greater Chicago area. And, with a large percentage of NIU Law alums working in the city, there is a significant networking pipeline between those building and those who have built their careers in such a thriving professional marketplace.

Of course, access to Chicago also means access to innumerable cultural, social and sporting activities commensurate with one of the most vital and thriving metropolitan areas in the world.
An Affordable, High-Quality Education

NIU Law is the only public law school in the Chicago area. Accordingly, we have both the responsibility and the honor of offering our students a high-quality legal education at an affordable price.

Our current tuition and fees for in-state residents are less than half the average tuition and fees for a private law school in Chicago. Students who matriculate as out-of-state residents may apply for and secure in-state residency in as little as six months.

In addition, nearly 50% of our second- and third-year students have significantly defrayed the cost of their law school education in one of two significant ways. They have secured Research Assistantships with members of the NIU Law faculty or have secured Graduate Assistantships at the law school and in various other schools and departments across the greater NIU community.

Research Assistants, or RAs, work with law faculty engaged in scholarly pursuits. They build important relationships with members of the legal academy and hone their research and writing skills. They also significantly cut their tuition expenses: waivers are typically for either 50% or 100% of tuition.

Graduate Assistants, or GAs, complete important projects at NIU Law as well as in relevant offices throughout the greater NIU community. They work in departments such as Student Legal Services, University Legal Counsel, the Office of the Ombudsman, and Housing and Dining. Most Graduate Assistant positions carry a full tuition waiver and often include a stipend to offset living expenses.

Many of our students also apply for and receive private scholarships and enter writing competitions publicized weekly through school correspondence within the NIU Law community, which help to defray overall indebtedness.

The cost of living in the DeKalb/Sycamore region is very affordable. According to a number of housing websites, the median monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in DeKalb is approximately $600. Comparable living arrangements for students residing in large metropolitan areas such as Chicago are nearly double that cost.

Because of these many opportunities and factors, recent NIU Law graduates have emerged with a debt load that is between 50% and 60% that of the national average.
How to Begin
Your Path to NIU Law

We recognize that you may be considering NIU Law as well as a number of other excellent law schools and encourage you to visit them all. It’s important for you to witness the dialogue in the classrooms, to meet with current students and faculty, and to walk the halls around campus. You need to feel that “intangible fit” that can only come from personal interaction.

Of course, we also believe strongly that NIU Law will exceed your expectations.

To make arrangements for a visit to NIU Law, please call us at our main admission line: (815) 753-8595 or send an email to: lawadm@niu.edu.

Each year, NIU Law enrolls an entering class of approximately 100 to 115 students arising from an applicant pool of between 800 and 1000 candidates. Our Admissions Committee offers admission on a competitive basis through an evaluation of an applicant’s aptitude and professional promise. Factors of most importance to the Admission Committee are one’s undergraduate record, LSAT score(s), reasons for seeking admission, school or community activities and accomplishments, employment background, and the ability to add diversity to the law school community and the greater legal profession.

Applicants to NIU Law are required to submit their materials electronically through the Law School Admission Council’s (LSAC) website at LSAC.org. In addition to the electronic applications, prospective students must submit personal statements, resumes, and letters of recommendation through LSAC.org. NIU Law requires applicants to use the LSAC Credential Assembly Service (CAS). International students who do not have a degree from an institution in the United States must submit all international transcripts and TOEFL scores to CAS. In order for NIU Law to receive LSAT score(s), applicants need to submit official undergraduate and graduate transcripts as well as two letters of recommendation to CAS. We encourage applicants to apply early, even if they have not taken the LSAT, due to the limited number of seats in each entering class and the fact that the Admission Committee reviews applications on a rolling basis.

For timely information on programs and opportunities to visit NIU Law throughout the year, please visit our admission web pages at: www.niu.edu/law.

“Throughout my 27-year career, my NIU legal education has given me the foundation to help build and refine the skills necessary to be an effective corporate lawyer. My professors prepared me for the challenges I would face on the job, focusing on developing the critical thought processes necessary to work through and resolve legal issues, developing positive working relationships with internal clients, and shaping top-notch negotiation skills.”

Wes Blumenshine, General Counsel - Caterpillar Financial Services Corporation, Deputy General Counsel - Caterpillar Inc. (Class of 1986)
College of Law

Mailing address:
Room 151
Swen Parson Hall
DeKalb, Illinois 60115
815-753-8595
www.niu.edu/law

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