

2010 WILLIAM PINCUS AWARD

Professor Christine Zuni Cruz

Professor Christine Zuni Cruz is a Professor of Law at the University of New Mexico School of Law and is currently co-director of the Southwest Indian Law Clinic. She has taught continuously at the University of New Mexico School of Law since 1993 and served as the founding and sole director of the Southwest Indian Law Clinic from 1993 to 2007 and continues to co-direct today. In addition to the clinic, she has taught Federal Indian Law and a wide range of courses in indigenous legal studies, including Introduction to Native American Studies, Pueblo Indian Law, Native American Rights, Law of Indigenous Peoples, Tribal Courts and International Advocacy for International Peoples. In collaboration with Osgoode Hall Law School, she instituted an exchange program allowing Canadian law students to study internal tribal law in the Southwest.

The Southwest Indian Law Clinic provides students with the opportunity to represent clients and communities in state, federal and tribal courts and in governmental agency hearings. Students have the opportunity to work with tribes, pueblos and organizations serving the Native American population. In her clinical teaching, Professor Zuni Cruz emphasizes community involvement, sensitivity to difference and a multi-disciplinary approach to complex problem-solving. She draws from theory to inform her clinical practice, including: reformulating student understanding of family structures in the social networks of pueblos and Indian nations; using models of cultural literacy adapted from medicine; deploying of identity theory from the social sciences to assess the complexity of insider-outsider relations and encouraging use of symbols, color and creative mapping to help students explore their cultural roots. Finally, Professor Zuni Cruz has demonstrated the practical capacity to elicit funding from the state Legislature each year, including an increase in funding during an economic downturn in 2007.

Her scholarship reflects ongoing concerns with Indian law, community and culture and with clinical legal education. She has written extensively on these areas, and has engaged her students in the ongoing exploration of these themes. A dominant concern of her scholarship has been the disparities that exist between the culture of the legal profession and academy on the one hand and the cultures of clients, communities and law students. In the words of one supporting letter, Professor Zuni Cruz “is elaborating the issue of the coercive assimilation that accompanies higher education and is especially pronounced in legal education, including in law clinics... Such approaches have direct applicability to clinical education for all students.” Throughout her scholarship, Professor Zuni Cruz has developed a critical voice that targets the risks facing clinical education as a part of a dominant institution. This voice in turn underlies her approach to clinic design, her selection of course materials and her interactions with students.

In addition to her extensive publications, Professor Zuni Cruz has spoken and presented widely, and serves as an organizing influence in her main areas of concern. She has served as a chair of the planning committee for an annual AALS Professional Development Conference (1999-2000). Recognizing a need to focus on unique issues of Indian law clinics, she founded and for the past four years has organized an annual meeting of the Indian Law Clinics and Externships

Symposium, with the fifth set for May 2011. The symposium assists clinicians in delivering programs that serve the needs of Native Americans. She founded the Tribal Law Journal, whose motto is “Let our voices be heard, let our stories be told.” The Tribal Law Journal, now in its tenth year, is a scholarly publication dedicated to the indigenous legal tradition and the emerging or “modern” law and public policy of indigenous nations and peoples. She encourages her students to view the Tribal Law Journal as more than a journal. In her words, “it is a movement – a modest, humble movement – to encourage indigenous peoples to own their own law and to preserve the native intellect and philosophy.” She serves as an invited speaker both nationally and internationally on the law and culture of indigenous peoples and has seen her articles routinely anthologized in collections.

Finally, and to a unique extent, Professor Zuni Cruz exemplifies the tensions inherent in balancing authenticity to a culture of origin and participation in a dominant legal culture. She continues to live in Isleta Pueblo, raises children there and commutes to work at the law school from there. She remains an active participant in the life of that and other pueblos. Since 1983, she has served as a judge in tribal courts of several pueblos, both at trial and appellate levels, including (since 1992) as an appellate judge in her home pueblo. This stance both within and between several worlds permeates her work. Her capacity for both critical reflection and full engagement has inspired her students and her colleagues, and has led to a complex and extraordinary vision of how clinics can enable justice by expanding the discourse to include neglected populations.