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Veteran Army lawyer heads unique clinic at UH Law Center to represent service members in criminal cases

HOUSTON - July 20, 2020 — The University of Houston Law Center is launching the nation's first military justice clinic in which law students, under the supervision of faculty and experienced military defense attorneys, will represent service members facing criminal charges.

The Military Justice Clinic is led by Jason Marquez, clinical adjunct professor and veteran of 21 years in uniform, over 15 of those on active duty. He currently holds the rank of major in the Army Reserve and serves as the deputy regional defense counsel for the Southwest region of the Army Reserve's Trial Defense Service.

"The idea for the program originated when I was serving on active duty and defending a capital murder case," Marquez said. "My defense team had three amazing law students assisting us with research and motions practice. I saw firsthand how law students could both benefit a defense team and could learn a great deal from exposure to the military criminal justice system.

"There are several veterans benefits clinics across the U.S., but this clinic is distinct because it focuses exclusively on assisting current and former service members with military criminal justice matters."

Marquez plans to limit the size of the clinic as it gets off the ground. Three students have registered for the fall semester and applications are being accepted from service members facing a court-martial, termination action for minor misconduct or an appeal or criminal investigation, including homicide.

Students will be assigned to defense teams and help lead clients from initial intake through adjudication of the case under terms of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Courts-martial are federal courts, Marquez explained, with rules of evidence and procedure that align very closely with the federal rules used in Article III federal courts. Trials are held before a military judge and panel of uniformed officers and, in some cases, senior enlisted service members. While some administrative cases may be heard in Houston, he said, most will be

adjudicated at the base where the soldier is stationed. Initially those will be limited to bases closest to Houston, Fort Hood, Fort Sam Houston and Fort Polk.

“I am delighted that the Law Center will have the first legal clinic to provide important representation to soldiers charged with crimes as well as provide our students with the necessary practice ready skills to become outstanding lawyers,” said Dean Leonard M. Baynes.

In addition to teaching at the Law Center and his duties with the Army Reserve, Marquez works for the UH System as the Clery Act compliance coordinator overseeing federal regulatory and statutory requirements for university crime and security statistics and programs.

A native of Los Angeles, Marquez earned a bachelor’s degree in Anthropology from UCLA and a Juris Doctor from The College of William & Mary School of Law in 2010.

Marquez credits Associate Dean Greg Vetter, HIPLA College Professor of Law, and Clinical Professor Janet Heppard, director of the Clinical Legal Education Program, for their support in getting the clinic under way.

“As an adjunct clinical professor teaching the Military Justice Clinic, I am blessed to combine my passion for military criminal justice with teaching tomorrow's leaders in the legal community,” Marquez said. “Hopefully some will take the course and decide that the JAG Corps is something they wish to pursue, regardless of which branch of service — Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard.”

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