Kalantry to Bring International Human Rights Clinic and Program to the Law School

When Sital Kalantry joins the Law School faculty in January as Clinical Professor of Law, she will add substantial further momentum to the Law School’s commitment to the study and practice of human rights law. She has been widely lauded for her exceptional teaching and mentoring, her rigorous and wide-ranging research, her incorporation of empirical and interdisciplinary methods into practical human rights advocacy, and her passion for social justice.

Her hiring has been hailed as “a major coup for our Law School” by Martha Nussbaum, Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics.

In addition to leading a clinic on international human rights at the Law School, Kalantry will also guide a broad expansion of human rights programming and further strengthen the Law School’s human rights research component. “Chicago’s world-class human rights faculty, its commitment to empiricism and interdisciplinary approaches, its excellent students, and the presence in the Chicago area of so many superb organizations committed to human rights in the US and abroad were all very compelling reasons for me to join the clinical faculty,” Kalantry says.

She has co-taught a legal clinic at Yale Law School and founded and led the International Human Rights Clinic at Cornell Law School, where she also co-founded and is the faculty director of the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice, which works with judges, legal professionals, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations to improve access to justice in an effort to eliminate violence against women and girls. “One in three women will suffer from some form of violence in her lifetime,” she says, “and although gender-based violence can take many forms in different corners of the world, many of the barriers to securing justice are shared experiences. These are among the issues I expect to continue to address with the students and faculty of the Law School.”

In addition to a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania, Kalantry holds a master’s degree in development studies from the London School of Economics. In the spring of this year, as the recipient of a Fulbright-Nehru Senior Research Scholar Award, Kalantry lived in New Delhi, India, where she conducted a study of public interest litigation in India and co-taught a clinical class that was offered jointly at Cornell Law School and an Indian law school.

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The Clinic

Kalantry is described by Tom Ginsburg, Leo Spitz Professor of International Law, as “the top human rights clinician in the country.” Her clinic’s students will work in close collaboration with local and international human rights organizations, focusing on drawing attention to human rights violations, developing practical solutions to those problems, and promoting accountability on the part of state and nonstate actors.

In preparation for their litigation and advocacy activities, which will likely include substantial work overseas, the clinic students will first learn about the application of empirical and interdisciplinary methods to human rights issues, participate in simulation exercises, and conduct background country and situational research. Then as they work on specific projects they may draft position papers and policy reports, advocate before international bodies, and work on in-country legislative reform and litigation. In the clinic, students will gain experience working with nongovernmental organizations, writing briefs, researching and drafting policy arguments, interacting with clients, and transforming communities.
Dean Michael Schill observes, “I have been so proud of our clinical faculty and the programs they run. Sital’s new human rights clinic will be just the new jewel that this crown needs. It will be a tremendous opportunity for our students to become great human rights advocates. When I read about the work she has done on behalf of abused women around the world, tears fill my eyes.”

**Scholarship**

Kalantry has studied, written about, brought attention to, and acted on a broad range of issues that include acid-based violence against women in South Asia (she published the first comparative study on acid violence in Bangladesh, India, and Cambodia), barriers to justice for women defendants who have been victims of domestic violence, and various aspects of US immigration and refugee law.

With co-authors Ted Eisenberg and Nick Robinson, she recently completed an empirical study of litigation rates in Indian states, analyzing over 20 years of data from high courts and six years of data from trial courts. That study found that higher litigation rates correlate more with a state’s Human Development Index Score—a composite of economic, health, and education indicators—than with the state’s GDP and literacy rate. “The implication is that simply improving the courts or macroeconomic growth are not the most important factors in ensuring that people are able to access the courts,” she says. “Assuring access to justice may require governments to ensure economic as well as social rights and opportunities.”

In an article published in *Human Rights Quarterly*, she examined how quantitative indicators might be used to assess a country’s compliance with international human rights treaties, particularly, how they could be applied to ascertain whether a country is providing the right to education in a manner consistent with the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. She has worked with local partners in Colombia to implement international human rights norms relating to the right to education.

“There are many synergies between my scholarship and practice,” she observes. “I have drawn ideas from my human rights clinical work for academic papers, and some of the ideas I have developed in academic works have shaped my approaches to human rights projects in the field.”

**Programming**

Although Kalantry is still formulating the programming she will initiate and lead at the Law School, her contributions will likely include arranging on-campus workshops, presentations, film showings, and conferences, and strengthening ties with the University’s Human Rights Program and with local and international human rights organizations.

Kalantry points to the large number of dynamic human rights organizations in the Chicago area with which she hopes to create strong connections, such as the Midwest Coalition for Human Rights and the Heartland Alliance. Her strong existing connections to international rights organizations would expand through her continuing activities. Susan Gzesh, who is executive director of the overall Human Rights Program at the University, says she is looking forward to working with Kalantry, whom she describes as “an ideal scholar-practitioner to lead University of Chicago students in understanding and utilizing international human rights norms to deal with complex social justice issues in the U.S. and abroad.”

Kalantry will also administer the student summer internship program funded by the Charles M. Jacobs Fund for Human Rights and Social Engagement, through which Jacobs Fellows from the Law School have served human rights internships in countries throughout the world. “This generous gift, honoring a wonderful humanitarian, provides a superb platform for students from the Law School to gain first-hand experience with human rights issues,” Kalantry says. “I look forward to my role in making the most of the opportunities it provides.”

**The Missing Piece**

“There is a great need for human rights advocacy, around the world and here in the United States, and that need seems to be growing,” Dean Schill says. “The University of Chicago Law School intends to have a preeminent role in meeting that need. We have had most of the necessary pieces in place for achieving that role for some time, and we have searched hard for the missing piece. In Sital Kalantry, I am confident that we have found it. Her combination of deep scholarship with superb teaching and mentoring is consistent with our finest traditions, and the ability she has shown for building strong human rights programs and collaborating across a broad range of parties is unrivaled. The day she said yes to us was a landmark day for the pursuit of human rights at our Law School.”