

# Student Legal Services at UC Berkeley: A History

The roots of Student Legal Services trace back nearly 50 years...



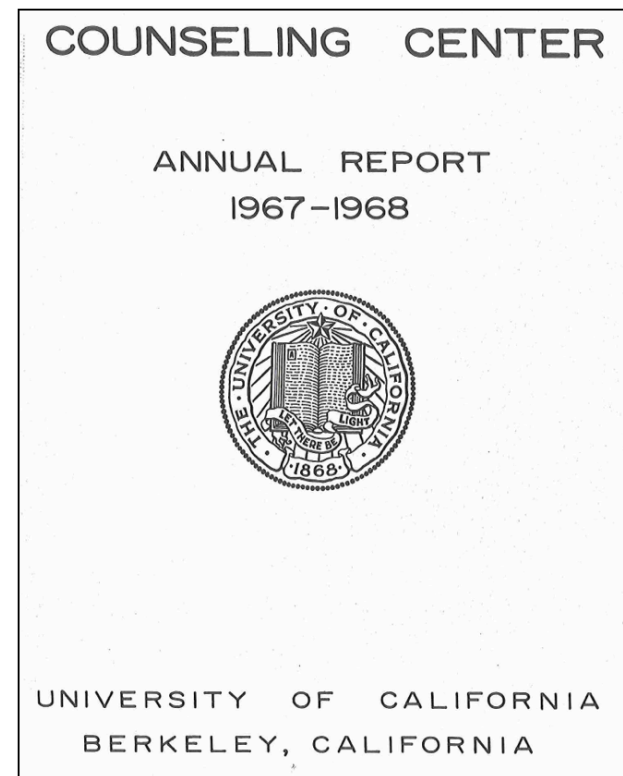
# The Founding of Student Legal Services

*Student Legal Services* (“SLS”) opened its doors at UC Berkeley on October 1, 1967 as part of the Student Counseling Center, which was directed by Ms. Barbara Kirk. Then called *Legal Counseling for Students*, SLS appears to have been the first organization of its kind within the UC system (UCLA started an analogous service, at the time named Student Legal Aid, in November 1969). Ms. Kirk had noticed that many of the students who sought therapy consultations at the Counseling Center were struggling with legal issues that were affecting their ability to stay in school. The number of requests for legal referrals was significant enough for the Counseling Center to launch *Legal Counseling for Students* as a potential solution. Until this point, the Counseling Center had been referring the students to appropriate members of the law school faculty who were willing to help them.

Since Legal Counseling for Students was part of the Counseling Center, it resided in one of the temporary buildings, T-5 specifically. These temporary buildings were located opposite Doe Library, on the current Memorial Glade, and were built to accommodate the new influx of returning soldiers from World War II who were attending Berkeley with the help of the GI Bill. The “temporary” buildings remained a home for various campus services until their demolition commenced in 1993.



Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley: Campus Views, “Temporary buildings north of Doe Library under construction, June 1947.”







The Counseling Center's 1967-68 annual report detailed these reasons for the creation of *Legal Counseling for Students*:

The [Counseling] Center for many years has been made aware of the need for this type of service through numerous requests from students for information about legal resources... the volume of demand was such that it was apparent that some formal service in this area needed to be established.

*Legal Counseling for Students* was set up to be available to all currently enrolled Cal students, who could make free, confidential, 30-minute appointments with an attorney working from an office in the Counseling Center. Advice and counsel were available on a wide variety of legal issues, but the attorney did not offer direct representation or advocacy for student clients. However, private counsel was sometimes sought to help a student on a pro bono basis. Many of the legal issues confronted by students at that time were similar to those today – then, as now, landlord-tenant issues topped the list – while others identified by the Counseling Center's 1967-68 report were more unique to the time: questions about the military draft, manufacturer's warranties, and personal property taxes.

To provide these services, the Counseling Center hired a recent (1965) graduate of UC Berkeley's Boalt Hall School of Law, Curtis Freund, to work with students. Mr. Freund was nominated for the position by the law school, which also set his salary. He worked three half-days, or ten hours each week, and in the first year alone provided more than 550 conferences. The Counseling Center reported that student feedback was "uniformly good" and that there was a possibility "for the future... [of] a more extensive and formal evaluation of the service." *Legal Counseling for Students* was a clear success.



	Page
<i>Report to Members</i>	
Charles L. Lewis, President, ACPA .....	2
Black poor at white colleges—personal growth goals	
Anne S. Pruitt .....	3
Higher education for the black student	
Joann Powell .....	8
<b>Legal counseling for students</b>	
Barbara A. Kirk .....	<b>15</b>
Community mental health model applied to student personnel work	
Louis J. Nidorf .....	19

## Legal Counseling for Students

Barbara A. Kirk

University of California, Berkeley

College counseling programs have traditionally offered vocational, educational, personal, and marital counseling. Additional time consuming and thereby expensive. Various patterns were considered. On some campuses, the Law School operates a campus

# Early Growth and Validation of Student Legal Services

A more “extensive” service did in fact take shape the following year when another recent Boalt Hall graduate, Beth Karren, was added in the Fall of 1968 as the second attorney on the legal services team to work on a part-time basis. Ms. Karren was one of only eight women in her Boalt class and eventually became the longest-tenured legal advisor at SLS, serving for more than 31 years. Ms. Karren recalls a time during her studies at Boalt in which her own law professor admonished her parents for sending their daughter to law school and taking a “man’s place” in the class. Overcoming these obstacles, Ms. Karren became an established and valued member of the Cal community, later stating that she ‘loved [her] job’ and wished she had ‘written a book on [her] experiences’. At the time Ms. Karren was hired, both she and Mr. Freund worked as independent contractors, but both eventually became part-time employees of the University.

Soon after the launch of SLS at Berkeley, Ms. Kirk published an article in the Journal of College Student Personnel (now known as the Journal of College Student Development) touting the impact and value of the service at UC Berkeley. Her article, titled “Legal Counseling for Students,” appeared in the January 1970 issue and described the origins of the office while providing details of its first year. In addition to citing the number of student conferences with the attorney (550) and the most common topics (landlord-tenant, accidents and injuries, and “domestic relations” were the top three), the article noted that the distribution of clients between male and female students corresponded to their proportion in the general student population – 69% men and 31% women (the current distribution at Berkeley is slightly more than 50% women).

Ms. Kirk's article also shared case anecdotes from that first year. For example, there was a female student who claimed that a male student was using a leaflet to spread untrue statements about her immorality and wanted to sue him for defamation. She presented her own leaflet with derogatory statements about the moral character of said male student. In turn, this male student wanted to sue her, claiming that everything he had said about her was true. In spite of such acrimonious conditions, the situation was resolved without any legal consequences for either side.

In noting that most situations referred to SLS did not require litigation, Ms. Kirk shared an observation that holds true today: "occasionally, the exploitation becomes so gross that the ponderous machinery of the law must be used if the grievance is to be adequately rectified." She also noted the importance of "preventive counseling" and a related plan for SLS to develop a brochure for students about landlord-tenant legal issues. The article concluded with the observation that "further expansion [of SLS] is almost inevitable. It is clearly a service needed, wanted, and asked for by students and legitimately provided under the fees they pay."

However, not all consultations with SLS had happy endings. Ms. Karren relayed a story that echoed Ms. Kirk's concern for the mental health of the student population when starting SLS at Berkeley. When a student walked in asking how he would go about suing his psychiatrist for putting "bad vibes into [his] brain," Ms. Karren began to fear for the safety of the psychiatrist. She stated that the student appeared to be extremely agitated and at times she, herself, felt uncertain of her own wellbeing. While Ms. Karren made attempts to alert staff to this student's behavior, it was too late. Tragically, this student threw himself from a building immediately after the meeting. However, in a more uplifting turn of events, Ms. Karren shared that one of her happiest memories was helping a middle-eastern Ph.D. student retrieve her son, whom her husband had smuggled back to the Middle East. She and this student are still in contact to this day.







# Organizational Shifts and Continued Decades of Service to Students

Sadly, in 1976, Mr. Freund stopped working at Legal Counseling for Students due to illness. Ms. Karren said that she had always liked working with Mr. Freund, as he was someone to “bounce ideas off of” and that it was lonelier working at the clinic after he left due to the restrictions of attorney-client confidentiality that prevented her from discussing student cases with anyone else. However, under Ms. Karren’s guidance the clinic operated at peak performance, consulting with hundreds of students each year.

By 1976, Legal Counseling for Students had moved from the Counseling Center into the Student Information Center in 102 Sproul Hall, where it resides today. Here, the program officially became known as Student Legal Services. Later the Student Information Center and Student Activities and Programs were merged to create a department known as Student Activities and Services. This organizational area, which included numerous programs and services to support students and enhance their co-curricular experiences, later became known as the Office of Student Life, then Campus Life and Leadership, and now Dean of Students/Campus Life. SLS reported to the Dean of Students (as part of the Division of Student Affairs) during this time. During Ms. Karren’s tenure, the FTE allocated to SLS was 0.53, and the service was not available during most of the summer.

In the midst of these various organizational evolutions, SLS simply continued to actively serve Berkeley students – under the leadership of Ms. Karren, and the subsequent directorship of Mark Lucia (also a Boalt graduate) starting in 2007 – meeting crucial and urgent needs of students and supporting their ability to remain in school.

As SLS rapidly approaches its “golden” 50th anniversary on October 1, 2017, it still serves hundreds of students every year by providing nearly 900 annual consultations covering many fields of law (with landlord-tenant, small claims court, insurance/accidents, misdemeanors/infractions, and family law topping the list). Student feedback about the service provided by SLS continues to be universally positive. Overall, in its most recent year, 99.2% of SLS clients were satisfied or very satisfied with SLS (with 90.5% being very satisfied). The current mission of SLS – supporting student retention by improving students’ ability to stay in school via high-quality counseling and assistance with their legal issues – is also being met: of students who reported that their legal issue was causing them stress, distracting them from their studies, and/or had them considering leaving school, 90.1% said “Yes” when asked whether the assistance they received from SLS improved their ability to stay in school and/or to focus on their studies.

In addition, SLS gives workshops and presentations on legal topics of interest to students, and offers a library of online materials including tip sheets, forms, and community legal resources. SLS collaborates with dozens of departments and organizations on the Berkeley campus and in the local community. It was recently recognized by the University Student Legal Services Association Western Region as its 2013 Outstanding SLS Office, an honor previously held by illustrious SLS programs such as UCLA, the University of Texas-Austin, and the University of Illinois.

As UC Berkeley’s SLS office heads into its next half-century of work on behalf of students, it will seek to maintain the highest standard of service while exploring new and expanded ways to assist students.



Attorney for Students Mark Lucia





# Student Legal Services

The Attorney for Students advises currently registered Cal students regarding their legal questions, rights, and obligations. A student legal consultation might include (but is not limited to) one of the following examples:

- [Acohol: MIP and Fake ID](#)
- [Auto Accidents and Insurance](#)
- [Debt and Collections](#)
- [Family Law](#)
- [Hiring a Lawyer](#)
- [Leases and Rental Agreements](#)
- [Security Deposits](#)
- [Shoplifting](#)
- [Small Claims Court](#)



## Contact Student Legal Services

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