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Trina Grillo—A Personal Remembrance

By David Benjamin Oppenheimer*

Trina Grillo was well known for her work in the areas of alternative dispute resolution, academic support, and critical race/gender theory. This symposium celebrates the important contributions she made to those fields, as well as her inspirational teaching. This personal remembrance acknowledges an area for which Trina was less well known—her support of clinical legal education at the University of San Francisco School of Law.

I first met Trina when I arrived at U.S.F. in the fall of 1987 to help direct its newly established civil rights clinic. Trina’s office was across the hall from the clinic offices, in the heart of the faculty office center. The faculty office center was a quiet place, particularly after 3:00 in the afternoon and on Mondays and Fridays, but the bustle from Trina’s office was ceaseless. Seemingly at all hours, students would be lined up to enjoy a few minutes of her company—her support, counseling, and encouragement.

Trina was, at that time, working the equivalent of two jobs at U.S.F. In one, she was teaching Constitutional Law, writing her landmark Yale Law Journal article on gender discrimination in mediation,¹ and developing a new course in alternative dispute resolution. In the other, she was directing the Academic Support Program, supervising the teaching assistants who worked in the program, counseling almost every student of color at U.S.F. (and quite a few others), and taking on all the chores that law schools seem to assign to minority faculty (at that time she was the only person of color on the regular faculty).²

For all of her responsibilities, she reached out to our clinic with the unbridled enthusiasm that was characteristic of everything she did. How could she help? she asked. How could we work together? How could we integrate our cases with her Con Law class? What about her alternative dispute resolution class? Which of her academic support alumni were signing up for the clinic? How could the clinic caseload affect attitudes at the

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² Based on my personal recollection.
school? Shouldn't the clinic play a role in the first year orientation? Would I help teach the orientation to introduce clinical methods? Could I talk with the minority students about clinical opportunities? civil rights litigation? civil rights careers?

In the three years we were colleagues, Trina and I acted on all of these suggestions. She made herself part of the clinic; she made the clinic part of her classes and her scholarship. A number of other faculty at U.S.F. had supported the clinic, and joined its primary supporter, Steve Schatz, in voting to upgrade its faculty positions to the tenure track and to commit the school to the clinic. With the exception of Steve, none were as active as Trina in integrating the clinic into the life of the school.

There is a utopian vision of legal education, shared by many clinicians and a few others, in which students and faculty join in a community of learning by doing. In such a community, clinical teaching is not "skills training"—it is the heart of the educational endeavor. While no school has completely embraced this vision, it has nonetheless been a force for change in legal education over the past two decades. Trina Grillo's work and life embodied that ideal by integrating her innovative teaching, scholarship, and counseling, and by her support of the centrality of clinical legal education at U.S.F.