Attorneys are often perceived by society as unethical and deceptive. Because the legal profession is afflicted with these ill perceptions, it is enormously important that legal education institutions encourage the development of truthful, ethical and service-minded graduates. One important and proven method of inspiring ethically-minded graduates is to offer experiential education opportunities through human rights practicums and clinics that emphasize ethics in practice.

The University of Wyoming College of Law has been given a unique opportunity to integrate the Center for International Human Rights Law and Advocacy, formerly housed at the University of Denver, into the College of Law in the coming two to three years. The Center has worked on a diverse range of issues including asylum representation, international women’s rights, international criminal law, aboriginal and minority rights, and economic and social rights. The dual mission of the Center is to educate law students to address international legal problems and to protect human rights at home and abroad. Embedded in this mission is a substantial ethics component that the Center aims to impart to each student in a lasting and significant manner.

The work of international human rights law and advocacy largely revolves around the notions of not only ethical lawyering, but also ethical human-to-human interactions. The Center’s clients are typically both low income and have also suffered grave injustices in their lifetime. The disparities between the clients and the students demand appropriate and upright interactions with the clients, with ethics a primary consideration in every case. Practically speaking, this means recognizing disparities between the life experiences of the attorney and the client as well as being sensitive to and aware of cross-cultural communication norms and differences. Additionally, we will have the opportunity to develop guidelines around the representation of victims who are also victimizers by assisting the government in removing/deporting potential abusers, even if it means separating families. In this practice, it will be of utmost importance to always keep in mind two key components to ethics: 1) Upright interactions with the client; and 2) zealous advocacy for the client within the court system and in the public eye.

Because the Center is new to the University of Wyoming College of Law, substantial groundwork and capacity building activities need to take place before the Center can be fully integrated into the College of Law.
Thus, I have formally proposed and received approval from the Dean of the College of Law, as well as my summer project supervisor Professor Noah Novogrodsky, to participate in an independent study research project during the summer of 2011 in order to aid the Center in its goal of integration into the College of Law.

My summer 2011 independent study project consists of a unique combination of two key components that further the goal of developing truthful, ethical and service-minded law graduates. First, I will be continuing the work of the Spring 2011 Human Rights Practicum Course by managing the four asylum cases our Practicum is currently handling, staying in regular contact with students who are overseas working on a case, and carrying out general administrative tasks for the human rights cases that students have undertaken in the Spring semester. A key component to this task will be to ensure an eye toward ethical student lawyering in each case the practicum is handling.

Second, I will be researching and canvassing the best practices of the more than 30 human rights clinics across the United States. In this process I will first formulate a list of questions that will shape my research and inquiries to these clinics (i.e., what are the key strategies that the clinics employ, what are the pedagogical models they follow, what are the “best ethical practices” in a classroom component, and what is the academic research they rely upon in their everyday operation). Next I will determine the best methods of gathering and compiling the information, and then analyze the information and data I have collected on each clinic. After this process, it will likely be clear what issues the Center should address first, and which issues require further research and study. The overall objectives of this research are: 1) Produce a written report of the “best-practices” of the clinics nationwide; and 2) Develop a strategic plan to integrate the Center into the College of Law as a year-round operating clinic.