

Background Information Handout for E-Learning as a Tool for Social Justice: *An Analysis of Utilizing E-Learning to Improve Outcomes of Low Income Self-Represented Litigants in Civil Legal Proceedings*



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Why We Need Legal Education for Self-Represented Litigants

Legal issues are a result of a break down in social, familial and educational supports and systems. Legal issues often result in the break up of a family unit, homelessness, and bankruptcy. The emotional, financial, social and time cost associated with dealing with a legal issue can also be detrimental to individuals, families, and communities.

Navigating the legal system without an attorney is time consuming, emotionally draining and can have detrimental consequences if a self-represented litigant does not know what they are doing.

Legal aid is free legal assistance for individuals with certain types of civil legal cases and who are at 125% of the poverty line or below. Therefore, to qualify for legal aid an individual must meet the case type requirements and be at 125% of the federal poverty line or below. Legal Service Corporation (LSC) federal grant monies are consistently being cut and legal aid budgets are reduced. Thus, even if someone qualifies for legal aid, legal aid might not have the resources to serve them.

	100%	133%
1	\$12,140	\$16,146
2	\$16,460	\$21,892
3	\$20,780	\$27,637
4	\$25,100	\$33,383
5	\$29,420	\$39,129
6	\$33,740	\$44,874
7	\$38,060	\$50,620
8	\$42,380	\$56,365

“Nearly a million-poor people who seek help for civil legal problems are turned away because of the lack of adequate resources...

According to LSC’s 2017 report **Documenting the Justice Gap in America**, of the estimated 1.7 million civil legal problems for which low-income Americans seek LSC-funded legal aid, 1.0-1.2 million (62%-72%) received inadequate or no legal assistance. That means for every 100 problems for clients served by LSC programs, between 62 and 72 of the problems are unable to receive the help they need.”
(<https://www.lsc.gov/what-legal-aid/unmet-need-legal-aid>)

Figure 1 Federal Poverty Guidelines for 125%

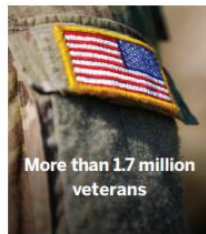
More than **60 million** Americans have family incomes at or below 125% of FPL, including:



About 6.4 million seniors



More than 11.1 million persons with disabilities



More than 1.7 million veterans



About 10 million rural residents

Data Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2015 1-year estimates

Unlike criminal defendants, parties in civil cases do not have a generalized right to an attorney. Without the option of legal aid and without the option of being able to afford to pay an attorney, many people attempt to represent themselves, ignore the problem or are completely unaware that they have a legal problem.

The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans

LSC America's Partner
for Equal Justice
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

A lack of legal assistance can perpetuate poverty and cost the government even more money than legal assistance. For instance, preventing eviction, is less expensive for the governments than providing emergency housing or dealing with homelessness. Providing attorneys for litigants in cases involving housing, health care, and domestic violence saves governments money and creates both social and economic benefits for families and society as a whole.

(<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/reports/2016/12/08/294479/making-justice-equal/>)

Even though Legal aid provides legal services to millions of people every year, it is not a solution to providing legal assistance to all the individuals and families that need it. The need far out weighs the available resources. The legal community and other social service communities must accept that we need to help people better represent themselves.

Table 1: Distribution of Eligible Problems by Extent of Service⁴⁸

	Percent of total eligible problems	Total from 2017 Intake Census sample
Total eligible problems	100%	195,776
Total served to some extent	59%	115,024
Served fully	28%	54,657
Served, but not fully	21%	41,371
Served, but extent of service is pending	10%	18,996
Not served	41%	80,752
Total problems not served or not served fully (excluding pending)	62%	122,123
Total problems not served or not served fully (including pending)	72%	141,119

The figure to the left is from the 2017 Justice Gap Report. It shows that only 59% of the people who are eligible for legal aid can get some sort of legal assistance. Which means that 41% do not get any kind of legal assistance from legal aid and of those 59% that do, only 28% get full legal assistance.

Figure 2 <https://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/images/TheJusticeGap-FullReport.pdf>

The top reasons most people represent themselves are: they decide to deal with the problem on their own; they don't know where to look for legal help; they are worried they can't afford legal help; they don't know they have a problem with a legal solution; or they don't have the time to deal with it. Those that do get legal assistance generally get legal advice.

Figure 5: Types of Services Received from Legal Professionals³⁴



If people are primarily getting legal advice anyway, educating people on how to find legal help, how to recognize a problem with a legal solution and how to navigate civil court procedures and process is not too far off the beaten path and could improve legal outcomes for both self-represented litigants and those with an attorney.

Figure 3 <https://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/images/TheJusticeGap-FullReport.pdf>

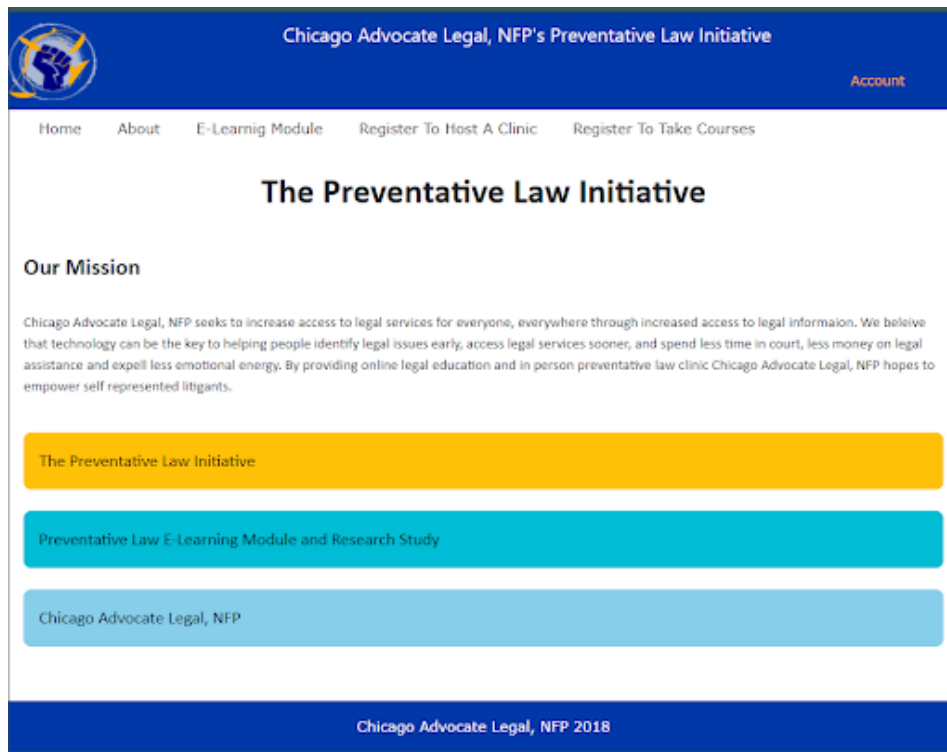
“Low-income Americans do not seek professional legal help for 78% of the civil legal problems they face in a given year. [T]hey turn to other resources about half of the time (for 54% of problems for which professional legal help is not sought). They speak with others who are not legal professionals (commonly friends and family members) for 33% of these problems, search for information online for 13% of these problems, or take both of these actions for 8% of these problems. When people search for information online, they often search for legal information about procedures to resolve a specific civil legal problem, legal rights on specific issues, or how to get legal assistance.”

(<https://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/images/TheJusticeGap-FullReport.pdf>)

Web Application for E-Learning Module

The Web application for what we at Chicago Advocate Legal, NFP are calling the Preventative Law Initiative is made using a Django frame work, Python, CSS, HTML5, Jinja2 web application template, and SQL for the database.

The web application is responsive meaning the pages will look good across all devices from a desktop computer to an iPhone.

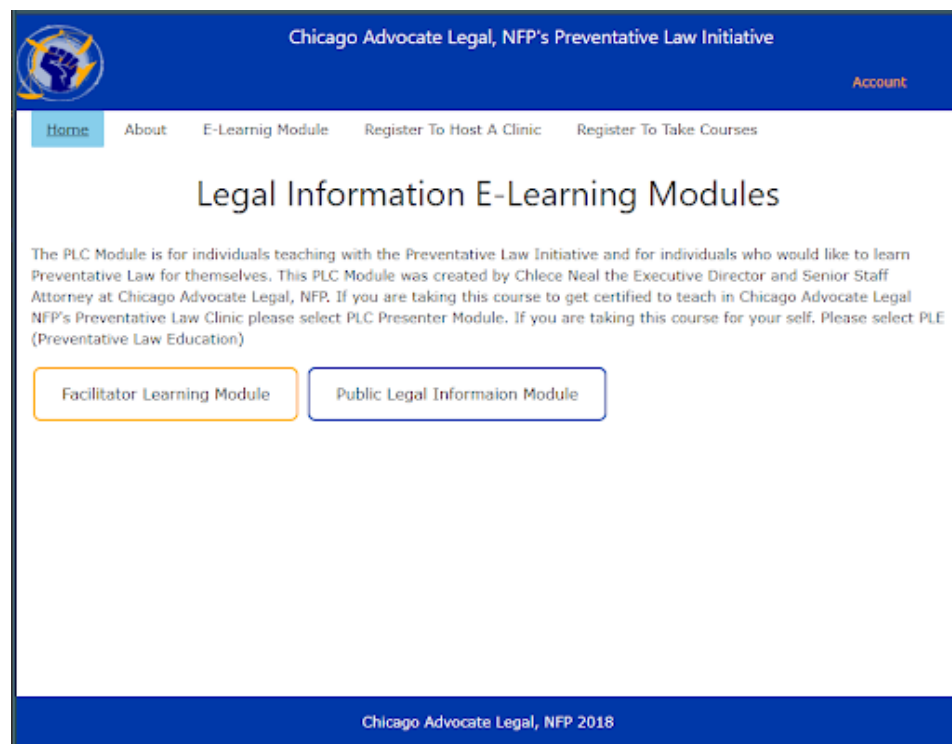


To the left is the homepage. The first thing users will see. The logo in the upper left-hand corner is the logo for the law firm. If the user hovers over the logo their cursor will turn into a pointing finger and they will be able to clinic on it and access our law firm website.

This image to the right is the entry point for the learning module. As you can see there are two possible tracts:

1. Facilitator and
2. Public

The Facilitator track is for those in the Preventative Law Mentorship Program. The students have to complete all the education modules in order to graduate to Legal Information Facilitator.



The below images are of the first module that someone will see if they click on the button.

Public Legal Information Module



Registration for class and to host a clinic

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Home About E-Learning Module Register To Host A Clinic Register To Take Courses

Register To Take Courses

Please fill out the form below if you would like to Register to take courses. Remember to take classes you must: be 18 years of age or older or have permission from a parent or guardian.

First name:

Last name:

Username:

Birthday:

Password:

E-mail:

Gender:

Chicago Advocate Legal, NFP 2018

- Participants must be at least 18 to take classes or have the consent of a parent or guardian.
- When the user puts in their birthday which is a required field if they are under 18 it will prompt them to fill out a consent form with their parent or guardian and upload it.

- Preliminary research showed that some participants didn't know they had a legal issue or had no interest in learning about housing or family law. However, after the clinic they either identified a legal issue or found the information to be very useful.
- Preliminary research suggest that online education will not be enough. In person clinics will be necessary to inform people of the resources and its usefulness.

Chicago Advocate Legal, NFP's Preventative Law Initiative Account

Home About E-Learning Module Register To Host A Clinic Register To Take Courses

Register to Host A Clinic

Chicago Advocate Legal (CAL) is looking to partner with organizations who provide support/services to low and middle income communities and individuals who are most likely to be self represented in court. CAL will offer an educational workshop for your organization and community members. Attorneys from CAL and volunteers/interns will facilitate the workshop in a location of the host sites choosing. Attorneys will usually be there to answer more specific questions related to legal issues while volunteers/interns will provide indepth legal education to your staff and community members on civil court process and procedures for housing and family law issues.

How It Works

Please fill out the form below if you would like to host a clinic. Remember to be a host site your organization must:

1. be able to provide free space;
2. must have a minimum of 10 participants;
3. it is recommended that the organization advertise the event for a minimum of one month. Contact Us @ Chicago Advocate Legal, NFP or [312-561-5510](tel:312-561-5510)

Contact person:

Pick a date for the clinic:

E-mail:

Telephone:

Add your website:

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