



Dorothy Bernholz of Student Legal Services

Tar Heel/Steve Matteson

# In need of some legal advice? 3 lawyers are at your service

By **ALEX MARSHALL**  
Staff Writer

How would you like to have your own personal lawyer at your disposal, just like a large corporation or some rich big shot? If you found yourself in a sticky situation and needed some legal advice, you'd swivel in your leather desk chair, reach for the phone and talk to "your" lawyer while you chomped on a cigar.

Well, as a matter of fact, you do have your own lawyer — three of them — Dorothy Bernholz, David Kirkman and Carol Badgett. You have to share them with 23,000 other students, but they are your lawyers — your student activity fees pay their salaries.

They are Student Legal Services and are located in Suite 222 in the Student Union. And if you need their advice, just walk in or call any weekday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Their telephone is 933-1303. No appointment necessary.

These three lawyers represent over 200 students a month — "Which any lawyer will tell you is a lot of clients," Bernholz said.

Bernholz is the director of SLS and is one of the two full-time lawyers there; Carol Badgett

works part-time. Bernholz has been with the program since its start in 1975.

What exactly can your lawyers do for you?

With 23,000 possible clients, there are some limitations. But they can represent a student, free of charge, for the following situations and problems.

They can help you in landlord/tenant disputes. This accounts for the largest percentage of their cases, Bernholz said. A student might come in and say he did not get his security deposit, or the apartment he lived in was not being maintained properly. SLS will go to court if necessary, although mediation is always tried first.

SLS can help you recover damages in small claims court for matters involving less than \$1500. They can even carry out an uncontested divorce.

SLS also does "expungements" for students who have arrest records. SLS can strike the record from the books, if the student was found not guilty or the charges were dismissed.

Most importantly, your legal counsel can give you lots of advice,

both before and after you get in trouble. Students have even called them from jail, Bernholz said.

"Our best service is the advice we give," said Bernholz. "We try to get information out to the students. We don't want somebody to wait until they get in trouble to see us. We practice preventive law."

The SLS office has pamphlets on a variety of subjects, including leasing an apartment, traffic regulations, buying a car and lawful use of alcohol. One pamphlet, called "Dick and Jane in Trouble with Alcohol," explains how to avoid trouble with the law when drinking, and proper procedures to follow if you don't.

Is there anything your lawyers cannot help you with?

Unfortunately, they cannot help you sue the University, said Bernholz. This was one of the conditions upon which the University allowed the program to be created. Nor can they help you sue another University student.

When SLS was created in 1975, it was one of the first such services, said Bernholz. The principal rationale for its creation was that North Carolina had lowered the age of legal adulthood to 18, she said. Suddenly, students were able to sign legal contracts, such as leases, and suffer the consequences. Plus, she said, the University greatly expanded its enrollment about that time without building new dormitories, so students fanned out over Chapel Hill and Carrboro looking for places to live.

Bernholz emphasized that their services are very accessible to the students. "I've got a desk full of work," she said, sweeping her hand over the pile of papers on it. "Yet, if someone were to walk in, I'd see him immediately."

So if you find yourself in a bind, or better yet, before you find yourself in a bind, drop by or call your lawyers at Student Legal Services.

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