

Student Legal Services helps students fight back

By DWIGHT MARTIN
Staff Writer

A legal legacy of the days of student political activism is alive and thriving on the UNC campus.

Just like the old days, Student Legal Services offers free court representation to students who have landlord problems, minor consumer problems, or wish to settle an uncontested divorce.

Student Legal Services cannot represent students who wish to bring suit against the University or the state of North Carolina. Representation or advice cannot be given to students who wish to bring suit against fellow students.

But some things have changed since Student Legal Services came to campus in the mid-1970s.

"This generation is far more aware of consumer rights (than the student activists) and far less aware of their civil liberties," a Student Legal Services attorney said in a recent interview.

Dorothy C. Bernholz, one of the service's two full-time attorneys, said that from the point of view of a lawyer who represents students, this generation was sometimes too respectful of police authority.

"But I'm beginning to see more involvement with victim's rights," she said. Today's students are becoming more concerned with assaults, which are rarely published unless an arrest has been made, she added.

Bernholz said she hoped this concern would lead to greater awareness and the establishment of a campus escort service.

Student Legal Services sees about 200 clients a month, she said. Nearly 25 percent of them have landlord problems.

"We advise students of their specific legal rights," she said. Students need to know what steps they must take to recover rental deposits, she added.

"We don't want to go to court," Bernholz said. Court costs are expensive for landlords. Eventually those costs will be passed on to students.

"We prefer to settle in mediation," she said. "We offer advice on an entire range of human legal problems. That's one of the reasons I like (my position)."

She said she had counseled students who had problems ranging from assault to civil contract to copyright.

Some students seek the advice of Student Legal Services before realizing they may be subject to legal protection or prosecution, she said.

One such student was the victim of incest, Bernholz said. The student's visit to Student Legal Services eventually led to a prosecution, she added.

Bernholz said she also advised many students who have legal problems arising from drinking or other forms of intoxication.

When asked what consequences the new drinking law will have on students, Bernholz said, "It's going to be a disaster."

The law makes it illegal for persons below 21 to drink alcoholic beverages.

It will be enforced on campus at the beginning of fall semester.

"Alcohol will go underground," she said. "Everybody, in my opinion, will continue drinking."

Bernholz said she expected drinking to be done in apartments, off campus, and that students would drive after drinking. Ironically, arrests made for driving while impaired may increase among students below 21.

Student Legal Services will advise underage students to expect arrest if they insist on drinking, she said. Area police plan to enforce the new law vigorously.

Bernholz said Student Legal Services is planning a series of educational Legal Lunches. Legal Lunches will provide a forum for legal dramatizations where "just about every possible circumstance to communi-



Tar Heel/Chip Beverung

Dorothy Bernholz, director of Student Legal Services

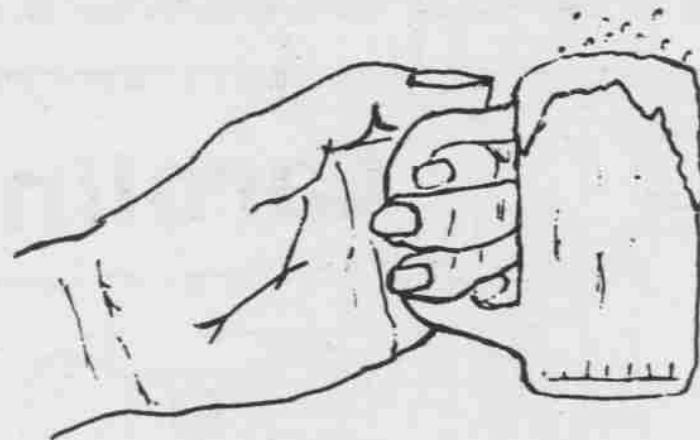
cate the (alcohol) situation" will be presented, she said.

"The only real justification for us being on campus is the educational process," she said. Taking legal

action involves problem solving.

Student Legal Services offers advice, in confidence, but cannot make legal choices for students, she said.

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