

# THE LAW SCHOOL INITIATIVE

The Law School Initiative promotes legal scholarship and teaching on reproductive health and human rights.

## The Background

Courts around the world, as well as United Nations and regional human rights bodies, are increasingly recognizing that a woman's rights to reproductive healthcare and self-determination are basic human rights that must be protected. The Center for Reproductive Rights has played a key role in securing these legal victories and works with a wide range of lawyers and law scholars around the world to establish human rights norms on reproductive health. Yet this emerging body of transnational law is not widely taught in U.S. law schools, nor is it widely incorporated in legal scholarship.

The Law School Initiative will invigorate scholarship and teaching around this growing body of law and train the next generation of lawyers to think about reproductive health in the human rights framework. The increased attention in the legal academy on international and comparative law, as well as the recent adverse decision from the U.S. Supreme Court in *Carhart II*, are generating significant interest in new approaches and make this an apt time for the Initiative. As the first and only global legal organization dedicated to advancing women's reproductive rights in the U.S. and around the world, the Center is ideally positioned to lead the effort. Professor Martha Davis, a well-known women's rights attorney and legal scholar at Northeastern University School of Law, is leading the planning phase of the Initiative.

## Key Components

- **Future Scholar Fellowships** will support the next generation of legal scholars on reproductive rights. The first such fellowship has been established jointly with Columbia Law School. The Center for Reproductive Rights-Columbia Fellowship is open to outstanding recent graduates from law schools nationwide. Fellows, who are in residence both at the Center and Columbia Law School for two years, conduct independent research and writing, as well as convene scholarly symposia and projects related to the Initiative. Fellows have a Columbia Law School mentor and participate in faculty events, including workshops, conferences, and other exchanges. They enter the legal academic job market in the fall of their second year.  
**Khiara M. Bridges** has been selected as the first Center for Reproductive Rights-Columbia Fellow and started her fellowship in July. Bridges is a top graduate of Columbia Law School, where she was a Kent Scholar and a Developing Editor of the *Columbia Law Review*. She expects to earn a Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University in October. Bridges focused her academic work on how reproductive rights law and biomedical ethics intersect to reinforce racial inequalities in the U.S. She did extensive field research in obstetrics at a major public hospital in New York City. Bridges earned her B.A. from Spelman College where she was class valedictorian.
- **A Visiting Scholars Program** will support scholarship that develops the theoretical bases and empirical analyses for reproductive rights advocacy, litigation, and policy. Established scholars in law and other disciplines will be invited to spend time in residence at the Center's New York offices to conduct independent research and engage with Center staff.

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## Key Components (cont.)

- **Roundtables, symposia, and conferences**, hosted in collaboration with law schools, academic associations, think tanks, and other institutions, will stimulate writing and research by bringing together leading scholars within and outside the U.S. to share their work and ideas. A series of small meetings will take place over the coming months and a major conference on transnational developments in reproductive rights law is planned for 2010.
- **Ongoing analysis of law school curricula and teaching** will encourage and support the teaching of reproductive rights and healthcare as human rights issues. The Initiative will examine and track how and where reproductive rights are taught within the law school curricula.
- **Development of course materials, publications, and other resources** will support the teaching of reproductive rights in stand-alone courses and integrate the subject into a range of other curricula, both academic and clinical. These include human rights, constitutional, family, and criminal law. The Initiative will also focus on ensuring that transnational cases and materials are available in translation for use in U.S. research and classes.

The Initiative is being funded as part of a three-year, three-million dollar grant from an anonymous foundation.

For more information on the Law School Initiative please contact **Cynthia Soohoo**, Director of the Domestic Legal Program at the Center for Reproductive Rights, at [csoohoo@reprorights.org](mailto:csoohoo@reprorights.org). To learn more about the Center and sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, ReproWrites, please visit our website at [www.reproductiverights.org](http://www.reproductiverights.org).