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Building Bridges to Practice

UB Law Forum
rived at Buffalo Law School students are among the first in the nation to benefit from an innovative series of "bridge" courses that emphasize practical knowledge and information to enhance their skills.

The intensive bridge courses are part of the enriched New Curriculum that is now being implemented to better prepare graduates to "cross over" from classroom learning to actual law practice. Students are able to select from an extensive menu of concentrated courses in practice skills, technology and professional issues.

R. Nils Olsen Jr., Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, says the practice-oriented courses were specifically designed to be taken in a three-week period between semesters. The first series was offered in January and February.

First-year law students are required to take one mandatory course from among choices including:
- Counseling
- Mass Tort Litigation
- The Lawyer's Role in Negotiation
- Advocacy for Reform
- Disability Issues
- Regulating Pollution
- Products and the Law
- Real Estate Financing Transactions

Upper division students may select elective bridge courses from among 14 "hot" topics, including:
- Advanced Computers - students learn to use the Internet as an information source, as well as the legal application of hypertext programs, and CPM for lawsuit scheduling.
- Advanced Contracts: Technical Licensing - students analyze recent cases and review rights under patent trademark, copyright, trade secret law and limits to con-
As the curtain went down on the 1995 academic year, UB Law School alumni/a played major roles in the mini-drama that was the culmination of the school's new Research and Writing Program.

First-year law students who were completing the inaugural year of the program — designed to develop sophisticated analytical, writing and presentation skills — demonstrated what they learned in a moot-court-style series of arguments. About 50 UB Law alumni/a and faculty acted as judges and provided feedback.

The alumni/a participation reflected intense interest in the Research and Writing Program, a key element of the Law School's New Curriculum.

"So much of what we do as lawyers involves research and communication," says Dan D. Kahane '79, a member of the Western New York law firm of Hurwitz & Fine who served as a judge for the arguments. "You really need the ability to find an answer to a problem and effectively communicate it, whether in writing or orally. Those skills are of critical importance to a new lawyer as well as to a more senior lawyer. ... I think this program is a terrific addition to the curriculum."

Professor Lucinda M. Finley, director of the program, noted that although only a small proportion of attorneys will ever have to stand up in a courtroom and deliver an argument, it's important for all lawyers to have that ability.

"Even if someone never winds up being in court," she says, "they may have to present research verbally to a client or to another lawyer. We are teaching students legal reasoning and analytic skills and the ability to think on their feet — to communicate orally in addition to in writing, and to respond on the spot to a probing question."

The cases argued in the end-of-the-year event, Finley says, were "all drawn from and were very closely based on real cases" before the New York State and federal appellate courts. They were:

- A religious freedom/First Amendment case stemming from a U.S. Supreme Court decision that said school districts may not sponsor prayer, but left open the question of what happens when students demand a prayer, for example at a graduation ceremony.
- An argument over whether an injunction that keeps protesters a certain distance away from abortion clinics violates