Advocacy Institute to Build on Success Under New Leadership

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Advocacy training is at the heart of graduating profession-ready lawyers. With a new director in place and a Blueprint for Excellence in development, the School of Law's Advocacy Institute is looking to further its mission of offering students multiple opportunities to hone their advocacy skills through coursework, competitions and direct service.

Following the departure of Professor Charles Patrick Ewing, Professor Kim Diana Connolly has been appointed as director of the Advocacy Institute, the umbrella organization for the law school's trial and appellate advocacy offerings, moot courts, alternative dispute resolution training and competitions, and its Innocence and Justice Project. Connolly is the vice dean for advocacy and experiential education, and also serves as director of clinical legal education.

“Throughout her academic career, Kim has dedicated her work to helping law students become profession-ready, and has supported other law school faculty in doing the same,” says interim Dean James A. Gardner. “Her focus on curricular integration and her advocacy experience will help guide the Institute as it continues to evolve. Kim also brings strong fundraising, management and law firm experience, skills that are crucial to the success of the Institute going forward.”

The Institute, launched in 2014, is “designed to serve as a fulcrum to the advocacy education efforts of UB School of Law,” Connolly says. “It connects experts (both professional and academic) in various forms of advocacy to law students on a weekly, if not daily basis, and provides them with the support needed to make learning fun.

“In the past several years, UB law students supported by the Institute have placed or taken top prizes in various regional and national competitions, which is a testament to the hard work of our coaches and students in fiercely preparing to compete. But as importantly, Institute programming has offered over half the law school class the opportunity to experience advocacy in a hands-on, supported setting, better readying every student who participates for the practice of law.”

In consultation with its national advisory board, Connolly is developing a Blueprint for Excellence to guide the Institute’s continued growth. The board, chaired by renowned Buffalo trial attorney Terrence M. Connors ’71, includes more than a dozen accomplished practitioners from the bench and bar, including highly regarded experts in New York City, Chicago and Washington, D.C.

“The Advocacy Institute benefits from the commitment of a national
The successful initial years of Institute activity have taken us to a point from which next steps can be outlined based on experience,” she says. “In the process of developing a plan for moving forward, we can take stock of our successes, examine what other top schools are doing, assess our resources, and plan a program for the coming five years that will leverage the investment and bring even more success to the program. One specific focus of the planning process is to better interweave the advocacy offerings through the curriculum into a cohesive program.”

One of many students who have benefited from the work of the Institute is Courtney D. Morphet ’17 – so much so that she recently met with the advisory board to share her experiences. Morphet told the board members about her trial advocacy team’s victory this year in the Queens County District Attorney’s Mock Trial Competition, and says her team all left with job offers from that DA’s office and downstate defense firms.

More importantly, she says that being part of several trial advocacy teams sharpened her advocacy skills. When she was interning last summer at the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York, she says, “I watched young attorneys making some mistakes – and I knew they were mistakes because I had seen them happen in competition.”

In the coming year, a new Advocacy Institute podcast series will be launched, offering online access to presentations by experts from the region and nation – a one-stop shop for advocacy lessons. “It will be useful not just to students hoping to graduate with profession-ready experience, but also to practitioners looking to polish their skills,” Connolly says. Additional new programming is in the works with the goal of ensuring that the Institute builds on its continuing commitment to offering the kind of excellent advocacy training opportunities available at top-ranked programs nationally.

The UB School of Law team at the Queens County District Attorney’s Annual Mock Trial Competition.