Building Strength in the Courtroom

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol32/iss1/16

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.
From courtroom to classroom

Hon. Thomas P. Franczyk is stepping down from the Erie County Court bench, ending nearly two decades of service as a judge – and stepping up for UB School of Law.

The longtime co-director of the school’s trial advocacy program will add significant teaching responsibilities to that role. “My goal is to bring 34 years of practical experience from the courtroom into the classroom, and give students a real-life perspective on the practice of law,” says Franczyk, who spent 14 years as a prosecutor before his election to Buffalo City Court and then County Court.

That experience will be in play as he teaches a course in Evidence starting this spring, as well as a course designed especially for students in the two-year J.D. and master of law programs, many of them foreign-trained lawyers seeking a further academic credential.

Franczyk first got involved with the School of Law’s trial teams – which travel the world representing the law school at high-level competitions – back in 1994. “I got the bug back then, but I could only participate on a limited basis,” he says. “I’ve always enjoyed working with the students, and I still enjoy it. I enjoy watching them progress from people who look uncomfortable in the courtroom to becoming lawyers who are ready to walk into a courtroom and try a case.”

In his trial advocacy role, he will continue to coach teams in both fall and spring semesters, and to oversee the Buffalo-Niagara Mock Trial Competition, the largest such competition in the nation. He’ll also draft some of the case problems that the school’s Trial Technique instructors use in their courses.

Franczyk also says he’s looking forward to returning to the classroom. “As a judge, I’ve always enjoyed doing the
research and writing, some of the scholarly aspects of the law,” he says. “This gives me an opportunity to dig down a little deeper on the academic side.”

The coach’s corner

“The amount of work you put into a trial team is unlike any law school class,” says Jennifer Scharf ’05. “It’s more like a job than a class.”

She should know. As a UB Law student, she says, being on one of those teams made all the difference. “It was a pivotal course for me,” says Scharf, newly named to succeed Christopher J. O’Brien as a co-director of the school’s trial advocacy program. “It was really one of those courses that taught you the skills of being a lawyer. All law school courses are important, but trial team taught you how to do the day-to-day. It made you feel courtroom-ready from the day you walk out the door.”

Scharf, whose day job is as legal counsel for Erie County Medical Center, will coach teams each fall and spring semester, as she has done since 2007. She’ll also continue teaching as an adjunct instructor, leading classes in Trial Technique, and serving as overall administrator for the trial advocacy program.

In that role, she says, “One of my major goals is to recruit new talent and a diverse and inclusive group of instructors.” She’ll also be thinking about how to broaden the base of students who come into the program – reminding them, for one thing, that it’s not uncommon for the lawyers who judge or watch these competitions to approach good performers afterward with offers of job interviews or employment. “We’re really proud of our job placement record for trial team students,” she says.

She has coached a lot of teams over the years. “There are so many high points,” Scharf says. “We’ve had a lot of great successes on my teams. But the thing I’m most proud of is that so many of the students I’ve coached are now my colleagues and my friends.”

Kudos

to all of our students who have tested out their newfound advocacy skills in a recent competition or event. Below is just a sampling of some of our top advocates:

Andrew B. Plewinski ’18 and Allyson L. Kehl ’18, pictured with guest judges Hon. Kenneth F. Case (far left), Dean Aviva Abramovsky and Hon. Thomas P. Franczyk (far right), took first place in the 2017 Desmond Moot Court Competition held at the law school.

Margaret L. McKenzie ’19 (left) and Alexandria N. Frainier ’19 (right), pictured with Steven R. Sugarman, director of the mediation clinic, won the 2017 Representation in Mediation Competition held in O’Brian Hall.

Left to right: Vicki M. Bell ’19, Amanda L. Oppermann ’18, Kaylan C. Porter ’18 and Luwing Peche Loayza ’18 took third place in the NYS Bar Association Dispute Resolution Section’s 2017 Judith S. Kaye Arbitration Competition in New York City.