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Ambitious plans unveiled for Advocacy Institute

A longtime SUNY Buffalo Law School professor who has spent a lot of time in courtrooms throughout the nation is unveiling ambitious plans for the school's Advocacy Institute, which helps students and legal practitioners develop essential skills in litigation and advocacy.

SUNY Distinguished Service Professor **Charles Patrick Ewing**, who helped found the Advocacy Institute, has been named its permanent director and hopes the institute will become an important resource for honing skills such as trial and appellate advocacy, settlement negotiations and managing clients. Even for those whose practice does not include litigation, he says, the institute's programs will make for better lawyering. **Terrence M. Connors**, a prominent trial lawyer and a founding member of the Connors and Vilardo law firm, is working closely with Ewing as chairman of the Advocacy Institute Advisory Board, to develop, enhance and expand the program.

The Advocacy Institute encompasses three key areas of legal training offered through SUNY Buffalo Law School: trial advocacy, appellate advocacy and alternative dispute resolution.

The trial advocacy component includes the Law School's trial technique courses, in which students learn comprehensive strategies for how to conduct trials, as well as more narrowly focused skills courses on topics such as how to pick a jury or how to cross-examine a witness. This component also includes the Law School-sponsored Buffalo-Nia-



Top, SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Charles Patrick Ewing

Above, Terrence M. Connors, chairman of the Advocacy Institute Advisory Board



gara Mock Trial Competition, held each November, and student trial teams that take part in trial competitions nationwide.

Most of the Law School's trial-related courses are taught by practicing attorneys and judges who teach as adjunct faculty. Ewing envisions strengthening the training they receive, for example by

sending them to conferences and bringing in experts to help these practitioners become more effective teachers of trial advocacy skills. The Advocacy Institute may also sponsor continuing education opportunities, to continue to build bridges between the Law School and the legal community. And because students report that their trial team experiences are richly rewarding, the hope is to fund more such teams and make sure they get the highest-quality coaching possible.

Within the Advocacy Institute, **Hon. Thomas P. Franczyk**, an Erie County Court judge, and **Christopher J. O'Brien** of Buffalo-based O'Brien Firm are adjunct faculty members and co-directors of trial advocacy.

In appellate advocacy, the Advocacy Institute encompasses two nationwide competitions run by SUNY Buffalo Law – the Herbert J. Wechsler National Criminal Moot Court Competition and the Albert R. Mugel National Moot Court Tax Competition – as well as the intramural Charles S. Desmond Moot Court Competition. Ewing is looking to involve more students in these learning opportunities, and to link the Desmond competition more closely with Legal Analysis, Writing and Research, the foundational three-semester skills program for first- and second-year law students. He also hopes to get more of the school's full-time faculty involved with these moot court programs, particularly as coaches and mentors for students competing in regional, national and international moot court competitions.

To watch a video about our Advocacy Institute, visit www.law.buffalo.edu/forum/extra

After serving seven highly successful years overseeing the appellate advocacy programs, Professor **George Kannar** will now hand over their supervision to Lecturer **Patrick J. Long '00**, who teaches in the Law School's Legal Analysis, Writing and Research program, and runs the Veterans Legal Clinic.

And in the increasingly important area of dispute resolution, the Advocacy Institute comprises the school's courses in mediation and arbitration, as well as SUNY Buffalo Law teams that compete in national mediation competitions, and an annual in-house mediation competition. This segment of the Advocacy Institute is under the direction of **Steven R. Sugarman '85**, an attorney and mediator with Pusatier, Sherman, Abbott & Sugarman, in Kenmore, N.Y. Plans are to broaden the focus of ADR to also include settlement negotiation – a vital skill, Ewing notes, in that the vast majority of legal actions are settled before trial.

In addition to these existing components, Ewing also envisions an innocence project as part of the Advocacy Institute, to be directed by adjunct faculty member **John R. Nuchereno**, of the Buffalo law firm Nuchereno & Nagel. In this initiative, students under faculty supervision would examine the cases of prisoners who claim that they were wrongfully convicted.

"The idea is to serve as an aid to the criminal justice system," he says, "in helping to exonerate people who are wrongfully convicted, and as a training vehicle for students." Students would examine transcripts, motions and prior decisions in a case, and in the process learn how a case progresses from accusation to indictment to trial to conviction to post-conviction remedies and appeals. If a claim of wrongful conviction has merit and proceeds to litigation, Ewing says students may even end up helping to litigate such cases.

Other law schools that have established an innocence project have found huge demand, Ewing says, and the time and money it takes to investigate these cases will be a limiting factor.

Private support has been key to the launch of the Advocacy Institute, with the first phase being led by five founding donors, each of whom has invested \$100,000 or more in initial support: Terrence M. Connors '71 and the law firms of Goldberg Segalla, Brown Chiari, Barclay Damon and Phillips Lytle. The pace and scope of an expanded Advocacy Institute depends upon securing additional resources, in both time and donations, from SUNY Buffalo Law alumni and friends across the country.



From left, Christopher O'Brien, co-director of the Trial Advocacy Program; Alyssa Zongrone '15; Todd Potter '15; and Stephen Earnhart '14

Hard work pays off in practice skills

Students often speak of their Advocacy Institute experiences – the rigors of trial technique courses, the camaraderie of being on a trial team or a moot court team – as among the best of their time at the Law School. But what about after graduation?

To hear a few of them tell it, the advocacy skills they learned at Buffalo Law start making a difference right away as they begin their careers.

In her job as a staff attorney for Legal Services of Central New York, for example, **Kerisha Hawthorne-Greer '14** stands before judges every day to plead for her indigent clients who are facing eviction or other legal jeopardy. She's comfortable in that milieu, she says, having worked out those new-attorney jitters in trial technique class and as part of the Wechsler criminal law moot court competition.



Kerisha Hawthorne-Greer '14 now represents indigent clients in civil actions.

"The setup is different, but I'm using the same skills as I did in moot court," she says.

"Practice is nothing like law school, but a lot of the nerves I had around going in front of the judge and making arguments on behalf

of my client have dissipated. And the preparation is somewhat similar."

Todd Potter '15 is pursuing public service of a different kind, as a candidate for the Tonawanda (N.Y.) Town Board. In Law School he was a member of a successful team in the Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition, and went on to coach other students.

"I went to Law School not necessarily to be a practicing lawyer, but as an incubation period for running for office," Potter says. "But the exposure to trial advocacy I had, and my experiences with moot court, have brought me back to the idea of practicing."