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## New Instructors Boost Research and Writing

UB Law Forum

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# New instructors boost research and writing

**T**he highest-profile change in UB Law School's legal skills curriculum – now called LAWR, for Legal Analysis, Writing and Research – is the addition of a required third semester of legal research and writing training for all students during their second year. In the first two semesters of research and writing, students learn the rubrics for how lawyers conduct research, organize an argument and write clearly and persuasively in a legal format. The additional semester-long course, initiated in response to interviews with judges, judicial clerks and attorneys, as well as a survey of other top U.S. law school curriculums, offers students additional coaching in these indispensable skills.

The school has hired two new instructors with significant skills and experience in this important area to help implement the additional courses.

**Bernadette Clor** is a returnee – she served from 2005 to 2009 as research and writing instructor at UB Law, leaving to become confidential law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge William M. Skretny. In that clerkship, she researched a myriad of criminal and civil legal issues; drafted proposed decisions and orders; and supervised law clerks and interns, including training them in research and writing skills. She is a cum laude graduate of Cornell Law School.

"One of the big pushes coming from the bar," Clor says, "is for students to have more practical experience with legal skills, in particular research and writing. The idea is to give them more exposure to those skills."

The new course, she says, will provide more opportunities for students to practice the skills they have already learned, and introduce some new materials. "It will be structured to give them a greater depth of experience," Clor says. "Students sometimes don't realize how much they'll use these skills in practice. Whether they end up in public service, private practice or government work, these skills will translate."

Changes in the profession, she says, have made it even more crucial that law schools provide these real-world

skills. "As practice has become more focused on billable hours," she says, "new associates are not getting the mentoring at law firms that they would get in the past. You're not going to be the best lawyer you can be in the first year out of law school. But one of the great things about practice is that as you go along, the better you get and the more experienced you get. And that experience never gets devalued."

She's excited about returning to the classroom, she says, partly because it's a chance to coach students about the changing realities of the profession. "A strong skills program at UB can not only benefit the school but also have an impact on the profession in a meaningful way," she says.

**H**er colleague **Monica Wallace '94** sees in the research and writing program "an opportunity to help shape the next generation of UB Law School graduates and help provide them with the tools that they'll need to succeed. I see this program as evidence that the Law School is serious about and firmly committed to helping our graduates meet the extraordinary demands of practicing law."

She, too, notes the changing nature of the profession, particularly the time demands that attorneys face. "You're really required to be on call around the clock," she says. "The profession is becoming more of a business in many ways, and it requires lawyers to be more attentive to how much time they spend billing their clients. Practitioners who can produce good-quality work at a very efficient rate for their clients will be rewarded."

Wallace has served since 1998 as confidential law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge Richard J. Arcara. In that capacity, she has performed research on complex legal issues; analyzed applicable statutes, legislative history and case law; conducted pretrial conferences and settlement conferences; and assisted with all aspects of civil and criminal cases before the court.

Drawing on those experiences, as well as ideas from a recent symposium

on teaching advanced legal writing, Wallace expects the third-semester course will further refine the skills that students acquire in their first two sections of research and writing.

"One of the goals of the legal writing program is to help students further develop their legal writing and analytical skills by requiring them to address more complex legal issues," she says. "It's about practice in the art of oral and written advocacy, and the more opportunities a student has to practice, the better."

"We will do some deeper analysis of complex legal issues that will involve different forms of legal drafting work. We'll also be introducing students to how they should present themselves in dealing with a client. A lawyer has to present his or her thoughts in a clear, persuasive, sophisticated manner, whether it's to a judge, a client or a board of directors."

Her own legal work history, which includes a clerkship at the appellate court level and work in litigation, provides, she says, "a broad range of experiences to draw on" in the classroom. "I've conducted research and analysis on a host of complex civil and criminal law issues, sat in on dozens of trials, reviewed hundreds of briefs," she says. "I've seen both outstanding and poor advocacy, and developed some strong skills myself."

In addition, she says, she has worked routinely with student interns, including those from UB Law, in her District Court office. "Part of my job is to assign their cases, give them some guidance, have them give me a draft decision or bench memo, then review it and give them feedback. I really have enjoyed that."



**Bernadette Clor**, lecturer in Law, Legal Analysis, Research and Writing



**Monica Wallace '94**, lecturer in Law, Legal Analysis, Research and Writing