

Trial Advocacy Program

The American University Washington College of Law's Trial Advocacy Program provides experiential learning opportunities for students to gain proficiency in trial litigation skills. Skills are honed in a "controlled clinic" environment using a hands-on teaching style and cutting-edge technology that is the hallmark of the Program's structure. The Program focuses on learning by doing, with practical instruction, demonstrations, feedback, and critique used to direct student learning.

The Program offers a broad range of courses. Each course includes basic skills training, development of case theory and themes, analysis of strategies, and professional ethics. Courses currently offered by the Program include:

"Trial Advocacy is a great course because it facilitates a safe environment to practice your trial skills. It slowly introduces students to the courtroom and its procedures."

—Jessica Mast '07

- Criminal Trial Advocacy
- Civil Trial Advocacy
- Trial Advocacy: Pretrial Litigation
- Trial Advocacy: First Year Elective in Pretrial Litigation
- Trial Advocacy: Litigating in the High Tech Courtroom

The Criminal and Civil Trial Advocacy courses are team-taught in small sections by a sitting or retired judge and an experienced litigator. Students divide into litigating teams and through simulation, try three separate cases based on case files developed by the National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA). Students play the roles of attorneys, witnesses, and jurors in two of the trials. This simulation structure allows students to get "on their feet" in a courtroom and, with the guidance and instruction of the faculty, learn the tools of courtroom lawyering. A unique feature of this Program is a professional actor who critiques student performances and teaches stage techniques to improve presence and persuasion.

In addition to the semester-long coursework associated with Civil and Criminal Trial Advocacy, both courses feature a final mock trial which takes place in the Montgomery County Courthouse in Rockville, Maryland, with trial court judges presiding. To further enhance the realism of this final trial, the Program uses outside witnesses and enlists the assistance of local high schools to provide jurors for all of the final mock trials. The result is an environment that gives the students an opportunity to work before a jury, and provides local high school students the opportunity to better understand the workings of the legal system.

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Faculty & Staff

Prof. David Aaronson, Director
Prof. Elizabeth Boals, Assist. Director
Kimberley Stalker Green, Coordinator
Judge William C. Miller
Judge Irma S. Raker (JD '72)
Judge William Cave
Judge DeLawrence Beard
Judge Nelson W. Rupp, Jr. (JD '74)
Judge Michael D. Mason
Judge Michael Algeo (JD '83)
Judge Patrick Woodward
Judge Stephen P. Johnson (JD '69)
Judge Charles B. Day (MA '80)
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Mark Gilday, Esq.
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Det. Lt. G. James Roby
Prof. Anthony C. Morella, Emeritus (JD '58)



Other courses offered by the Program include Trial Advocacy: Pretrial Litigation, Trial Advocacy: First Year Elective in Pretrial Litigation and Trial Advocacy: Litigating in the High Tech Courtroom. The Pretrial Litigation courses focus on civil litigation from the initial client interview, through the filing of a complaint, written discovery, depositions, and motions practice. The upper-class elective includes writing and arguing a motion for summary judgment. Again, these skills are taught through the use of a simulated case file, which allows students to learn the theory behind pretrial litigation and to apply that knowledge to prepare a case through the beginning of courtroom litigation.

Trial Advocacy: Litigating in the High Tech Courtroom focuses on the use of technology to support the lawyer's case. Using the Washington College of Law's modern courtroom, students learn to use PowerPoint, digital photographs, video and audio to enhance virtually every facet of a trial. They also are exposed to Sanction and the CaseMap/TimeMap family of software. These skills are taught through the use of NITA case files which allow the students to practice the newly learned techniques.

Altogether, the Program offers approximately 20 sections of the above courses to more than 240 students each year.

Mock Trial Honor Society

In addition to the range of courses offered by the Trial Advocacy Program, students are encouraged to become involved in organizations such as the Mock Trial Honor Society (Society). The Society is a student led organization that oversees and assists with the coordination and training of competitive trial teams at the Washington College of Law. Those student teams then compete in both civil and criminal competitions throughout the United States. Those students who compete with the Society are first required to learn the basics of litigation through the courses offered by the Trial Advocacy Program. As a result of this close relationship, teams from the Society have recently been successful in a number of competitions, including as finalists in the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers Criminal Trial Advocacy competition, and Gourley Invitational Trial Competition and as regional finalist in the Texas Young Lawyers Association National Trial Competition.

This combination of comprehensive curriculum, faculty and student organizations has resulted in the Trial Advocacy Program at the Washington College of Law being recently ranked among the best in the nation.

“Trial Advocacy was a fantastic experience because it was just that—practical experience. It wasn't just another classroom course. It gave me a chance to really experience what advocacy was like before real judges and practitioners on a weekly basis.”

—Travis Markley '07

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“No law student should graduate without taking Trial Advocacy. Even if you have no plans to litigate, it teaches you how to think on your feet, while it strengthens your advocacy skills. It helps you to think like an advocate.”

—Rebecca Maisel '07

“The combination of a comfortable learning environment and practitioner advice from real judges makes the Trial Advocacy courses the best place to learn practical lawyering skills.”

—Mike Kitzman '07

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