

Akron Law MAGAZINE



Advocacy in Action

Summer Trial Academy

Ohio Governor's Expedited Pardon Project
Celebrates 5 Years

Elk + Elk Intramural Moot Court Competition

Five New 3+3 Partnerships Established

Dear Alumni,

When I started as dean a little over three years ago, my vision was to reinvest in our strengths in the areas of advocacy and intellectual property (IP), and to take us back to our roots of producing practice-ready graduates who shape the future of Northeast Ohio and the nation. With the incredible support of the School of Law faculty, staff, alumni, University of Akron administration and the Akron legal community, I can proudly say that we have achieved our goals set three years ago. We have an Intellectual Property program that is stronger than ever and continues to grow. We acquired three new IP professionals to work with our new Intellectual Property and Policy Institute. We hired three new full-time tenure-track faculty members, who are currently visiting professors and will join the permanent faculty in August 2025. And we are thrilled to share that our applications for admission are up nearly 29% for the entering class of 2025.

Our strong advocacy program is featured in this issue of the magazine. Akron Law is known for producing graduates who are ready to practice and for producing outstanding trial attorneys. Through our legal clinics, externship program, trial advocacy program, centers, litigation certificate and core curriculum with an emphasis on experiential learning, our students learn how to be zealous, successful advocates for their future clients. In fact, I am often told by leaders in the legal community that when they hire Akron Law graduates, they know these graduates are prepared for the practice of law. We owe this success to the faculty, staff and alumni who support our trial teams, teach our courses, run our clinics and centers, supervise externships and engage with students through our programming. Thank you for your unwavering support!

I think you will find that the pages of this magazine contain the evidence of our work and the impact our alumni have on our students. Here you will read about alumni who support Akron Law and our students, now and into the future. You will learn about the accomplishments of our faculty, students and alumni as we highlight some of the amazing programs we have at Akron Law. These highlights shine a bright light on our core strengths as a law school and how we can all support the future of the University of Akron School of Law! I hope you enjoy reading about the Akron Law trial advocacy program and experiential learning. Please come and visit us – I would love to meet more alumni. I am truly honored to be serving as dean, and I send continued thanks for supporting The University of Akron School of Law.

Emily M. Janoski-Haehlen

Emily M. Janoski-Haehlen

THE UNIVERSITY of AKRON
SCHOOL of LAW

AKRON LAW MAGAZINE



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COVER: (Left to right) Lynn Williams '25, Andrea Rodriguez '25, Judge Jennifer Towell, Jared Matthes '26 and Theo Dyke '25 at the Summit County Courthouse after the 2024 Summer Trial Academy. Photo Credit: Professor Dana Cole



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SUMMER TRIAL ACADEMY

Akron Law's Summer Trial Academy provides students with invaluable hands-on training in trial advocacy. Akron Law second and third year students enrolled in the two-week summer course served as attorneys for the cases. First-year law students participated as jurors and witnesses. Each year, around 100 Akron Law students participate in the Summer Trial Academy. After two weeks of intensive learning and preparation, Akron Law students present their cases during mock trials at the Summit County Court of Common Pleas in front of sitting and retired judges and magistrates including Michael Altvater '08, Alison Breaux '98, Lynne Callahan '84, Christine Croce '94, David Fish '83, Chad Hawks '10, Taryn Heath '82, Chrissy Hartnett, Amy Corrigan Jones '01, Kelly McLaughlin, Sherrie Miday, Tammy O'Brien, Joy Oldfield '00, Cletus Pulliam '14, Susan Baker Ross '91, Mary Margaret Rowlands '89, Elinore Marsh Stormer '82, Thomas Teodosio '82, Jennifer Towell, Joseph Vance '99, and Jay Wells '02.

"Summer Trial Academy was an impactful experience that allowed me to sharpen my oral advocacy skills and present a full trial in front of a judge at Summit County Court of Common Pleas," said Shayela Harmon '26 who participated in the 2024 session. "It was a



Shayela Harmon '26 with co-counsel Stephanie Ledbetter '25

fast-paced but absolutely rewarding experience where I learned from local practicing attorneys how to present a case and admit evidence to the court. It is by far one of the best experiential learning courses that is offered at Akron Law!"

The mock law cases used in the course were selected and developed with permission using pre-existing fact patterns by law professor Dana Cole, the Director of the Summer Trial Academy, who teaches criminal law, evidence and trial advocacy. "To make the experience more realistic, we want the cases to be local and

appropriate for a Summit County jury," Cole explained. Lawyers who teach the course are members of the practicing bar in Summit and surrounding counties. These prosecutors, criminal defense lawyers, civil plaintiffs' lawyers and civil defense lawyers include attorneys Stu Baker '04, Susannah Bender '13, Daniel Bray '12, Lavell Payne Brown '14, Lauren Coriell '19, Marisa Darden, Joseph Darwal '14, Brian Dodez '09, Jessica Forrest '10, John Hill, Max Hiltner '13, Michael Karst '13, Kevin Kita '11, Seneca Konturas '15, Jeff Laybourne '05, Daniel Leister '12, Don Malarcik '93, Grant

Morgan '22, Noah Munyer '10, Imokhai Okolo '20, Brian Pierce '94, Scott Riley, Sharon Ross '15, Abby Schock '13, Rachel Smick '15, Kelle Sorber '14, Elaine Souder '19, Devon Stanley '99, Kristina Supler, Greg Thompson '12, Anne Valentine, Larry Vuillemin '73, Ashley Wakefield '15, Carlos Warner '97, Andrea Whitaker, Jacob Will '10, and Anthony Wise '13. Additionally, Distinguished Professor Larry Snider, Director of Percussion Studies at The University of Akron School of Music, has presented to the students in the Summer Trial Academy on the art of performance each year.

The best advocates in each trial receive the "Roo Award" – a six-inch brass Zippy kangaroo trophy.

"Opportunities like the Summer Trial Academy, where students have the chance to build practical skills and learn from practicing attorneys and judges, are all the more important since Ohio has recently adopted the NextGen Bar Exam," said Emily Janoski-Haehlen, Dean of The University of Akron School of Law. Ohio will administer the NextGen Bar Exam, focused more heavily on testing practical skills, beginning in July 2028. "We have a rich tradition of practical skills training with clinical programs dating back to the 1970s, so the Summer Trial Academy builds on that history of preparing students to be practice-ready upon graduation."

The Summer Trial Academy is one of the many reasons prospective students are drawn to apply to Akron Law. "Whether it's at a law school fair, on individual student visits to our beautiful C. Blake McDowell Law Center, or at our many admissions events throughout the year, we regularly hear from prospective students how important the experiential learning opportunities are as they are making their decisions of where to apply and ultimately – where to attend law school," said Barbara C. DiGiacomo, Associate Dean for Administration and Enrollment Management. "As we approach the ten-year anniversary of the Summer Trial Academy, the word has gotten out and the Summer Trial Academy is a big reason that students want to come to Akron Law. They know how important these experiences are in the job-search process as employers increasingly want to hear about the ways you've built those practical skills while in law school."



Andrea Rodriguez '25 with Judge Jennifer Towell



Judge Susan Baker Ross '91 with Stefan Skrinjaric '25



Portage County Magistrate Chad Hawks '10 with Richie Muniak '26

ELK & ELK MOOT COURT COMPETITION

Last spring marked an exciting milestone for the University of Akron School of Law with the launch of its first Elk & Elk Intramural Moot Court Competition. The competition, designed to give first-year law students an early opportunity to hone their advocacy skills, saw 30 students participate in multiple rounds of rigorous legal argumentation. Organized by Professor Charles Oldfield '99 in collaboration with the Moot Court Honors Society Board including Charli McConnell '24, Matt Bodnar '24, Kassandra Seabolt '24, John Skakun '24, Ifeyinwa Okafor '24, and Nolan Nadler '24, the event was a resounding success.

"Akron Law has a nationally recognized advocacy program," Oldfield said. "This competition helps enhance that program by giving first-year law students an opportunity to begin developing their oral advocacy skills. I'm grateful that Elk & Elk sees the value of programs like this and is willing to support it."

In the preliminary rounds, competitors presented arguments before a distinguished panel of Akron Law alumni and local bar association members, gaining valuable feedback and experience. The competition intensified in later rounds, with students arguing before members of the judiciary, including Judge Kristin



Students enjoy lunch and hear from Elk & Elk's Jay Kelley '93

Farmer and Magistrate Julie Everett of the Stark County Common Pleas Court and Judge Katarina Cook '90 of the Summit County Domestic Relations Court.

After a series of compelling arguments, Spencer Sandberg '26 and Eva Channell '26 emerged as the top two competitors, advancing to the final round. In a closely contested match, Sandberg was named the winner, while Channell secured an impressive second-place finish. The final round was presided over by Judge Jennifer Hensal and Judge Betty Sutton '90 of the Ninth District Court of Appeals and retired Judge Tom Teodosio '82.

"The Intramural Moot Court

Competition was an amazing event. It gives 1L students a chance to enhance skills that will last through our legal careers. Beyond the outcome, it was an invaluable experience," said Sandberg.

"The Elk & Elk Intramural Moot Court Competition was an excellent opportunity as a first-year law student," said Channell. "The competition provided invaluable experience in oral advocacy before panels of professors, experienced attorneys and judges. Finishing in second place was a rewarding achievement and the competition allowed me to grow both professionally and personally, sharpening my skills for a future in trial advocacy."



Spencer Sandberg '26 poses with the judges for the final round after winning the competition



Eva Channell '26 poses with the judges for the final round after placing second

Akron Law extends its gratitude to Elk & Elk for its generous sponsorship, which made this competition possible and ensured the competition's return in 2025. In 2024, Jay Kelley '93, managing partner at Elk & Elk, further enriched the experience by offering remarks to the competitors over the lunch hour, sharing insights into the legal profession and the value of advocacy skills in practice.

As the competition continues to grow, it promises to become a foundational experience for Akron Law first-year students, fostering legal excellence and professional development for years to come.

OHIO GOVERNOR'S EXPEDITED PARDON PROJECT CELEBRATES FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

What began as a partnership between the Governor of Ohio, The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and The University of Akron School of Law, has now grown to include University of Dayton School of Law, Cleveland State University College of Law and the Ohio Justice and Policy Center. More than 1,300 applicants have applied for pardon assistance since the clinic's inception, resulting in nearly 200 pardons – more than 100 of which have been handled by Akron Law's Expedited Pardon Project (EPP) Clinic.

Since the project began in January 2020, 123 Akron Law students have worked in the EPP Clinic – either as paid employees or for class credit. The students who serve as employees in the EPP Clinic do the hands-on work of screening all of the applications that come through UA to determine eligibility for acceptance into the project. This work includes reviewing the applications, completing background research and interviewing the clients. The results of their hard work are then turned over to the Project Team (made up of Professor Joann Sahl from Akron Law and project leaders from The Ohio State Moritz College of Law) to make a final determination on eligibility for the project. Once clients are accepted into the project, the students who work in the EPP Clinic for class credit represent them by assisting them with their formal pardon application. Akron Law's EPP Clinic has accepted more than 220 clients into the project and has secured 109 pardons to date.

Akron Law Edan Konturas '25 valued the opportunity to build practical skills while providing community service. "There are not many other classes or experiences in law school where you



Professor Joann Sahl '86 (front, far right) with students who have worked in Akron Law's Expedited Pardon Project Clinic.

get the amount of hands-on experience representing real clients than in the EPP Clinic. Working on this project was a great way to give back to the Summit County community, and being able to help people free themselves from issues in their pasts was extremely gratifying."

While providing the community service of aiding clients in the pardon application process, students who work in Akron Law's EPP Clinic have the opportunity to develop the soft skill of working with clients, while also building skills in research and investigation, organization and report writing, and collaboration. Each week, students participate in case rounds where they discuss pending cases and issues that have come up in their work. The EPP Clinic has been involved in an appeal, trial court motion practice, and work with the Governor's office on legislation. This variety of experience can be invaluable for the students in terms of building the practical skills that employers are seeking.

For clients who have been granted a pardon, the experience is nothing short of life changing. "It opens so many doors to opportunities that were previously closed..." said Sahl, "things like

employment, volunteering, licensing, international travel. The biggest impact of a pardon is that it removes the stigma and shame associated with those convictions." Akron Law Lynn Williams '25 found her work with the EPP Clinic to be the most meaningful experience she's had at Akron Law. "Professor Sahl's reentry class covered the sad reality of collateral consequences (e.g., limited housing, career, and volunteer opportunities) for those with past criminal justice involvement. The EPP Clinic allowed us to work directly with those affected to allow them to tell their stories of change and rehabilitation, and petition for a chance at a future they have always envisioned for both themselves and their families. The program is a model for communities everywhere and Professor Sahl's commitment and dedication to the clients and students is exemplary."

Learn more about the Ohio Governor's Expedited Pardon Project at ohioexpeditedpardon.org.

AKRON LAW ESTABLISHES NEW 3+3 J.D. PARTNERSHIPS WITH FIVE MORE UNIVERSITIES



John Carroll alumnae who are currently Akron Law students pose in front of the law school to announce the new 3+3 partnership with JCU.

The University of Akron (UA) School of Law continues to expand its accelerated pathway opportunities, partnering with three new universities on an opportunity for students who want to obtain a bachelor's degree and a Juris Doctor (J.D.) from Akron Law faster than the traditional route.

This partnership, which is commonly referred to as a three plus three (3+3) degree pathway, offers an exceptional educational opportunity for qualifying students. Participating students will benefit from this seamless, sequential pathway, graduating with both degrees in just six years instead of the usual seven. The benefits of this option include financial savings and accelerated entry into the workforce.

The 3+3 pathway will now be available at Bluefield State University, a public university and historically Black institution in Bluefield, W.Va., Concord University, a public university in Athens, W.Va., Franciscan University, a private university in Steubenville, Ohio, John Carroll University, a private university in

University Heights, Ohio, and Wilberforce University, in Wilberforce, Ohio, the nation's oldest private, historically Black university owned and operated by African-Americans.

Akron Law now has 3+3 agreements with 14 higher education institutions, including The University of Akron.

"We are pleased to offer affordable pathways to law school and a legal career for Bluefield State, Franciscan and Concord students, along with the students at 11 other higher education institutions," said Akron Law Dean Emily Janoski-Haehlen. "As a school of opportunity, we aim to create as many chances as possible for students to become lawyers. These new partnerships, which reduce the financial barrier, are excellent starting points."

In a more traditional pathway, students typically earn a bachelor's degree in four years and then take another three years to complete a Juris Doctor degree. The University of Akron School of Law's 3+3 partnerships save students a full year of undergraduate study, tuition and living

expenses. Students admitted under the pathway fulfill the fourth year of their bachelor's degree through the successful completion of their first-year law school courses. They will graduate law school and begin their professional journey a year earlier than students who follow the traditional route, increasing their long-term earning potential and giving them a head start on making a difference in their chosen field.

Students pursuing a 3+3 pathway will apply to Akron Law during their third year of college by submitting an application to Akron Law through the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC.org). Students must take either the LSAT or the GRE by the winter of their third year in college. All 3+3 applicants must also submit a certificate of eligibility from their undergraduate institution as part of their Akron Law application. Students may apply to start at Akron Law in the spring, summer or fall term.

Akron Law's other 3+3 partners include Central State University, Indiana Tech University, Kent State University, Robert Morris University, the University of Mount Union, Walsh University, Youngstown State University and UA, where students majoring in English, Political Science, Allied Health (Healthcare Administration), Business Law, Economics, History, and Philosophy may also take advantage of the 3+3 pathway with Akron Law.

"We are pleased to continue adding 3+3 partnerships to ensure a high-quality law school education is accessible to students," said Akron Law Associate Dean for Enrollment Management Barbara DiGiacomo. "We're eager to work closely with students from Bluefield State, Concord, Franciscan, John Carroll and Wilberforce who are ready to begin the application process."

Here's what each university had to say about its partnership with Akron Law on this opportunity for its students.

BLUEFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY

"This groundbreaking agreement between Bluefield State University and The University of Akron School of Law creates an incredible opportunity for our students to accelerate their path to a law degree," said Dr. Tamara Ferguson, Bluefield State's dean of the College of Arts, Education and Social Sciences. "By streamlining the traditional timeline, this opportunity enables students to save time and costs while receiving a top-tier legal education. We are thrilled to offer this pathway to our aspiring legal professionals and look forward to seeing them make a meaningful impact in the field of law."

CONCORD UNIVERSITY

"Concord University is excited to partner with The University of Akron School of Law to create a 3+3 pathway that ultimately leads to a J.D. degree," said Dr. Edward Huffstetler, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Concord. "Allowing students to complete their undergraduate degree with Concord while beginning graduate coursework with Akron Law is a wonderful opportunity for our students to be fast-tracked into one of the most respected law programs in the region, an opportunity that Concord is extremely proud to offer its students."

FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY

"As director of the criminal justice program at Franciscan University of Steubenville, I am delighted to support our institution's 3+3 partnership with The University of Akron School of Law," said Dr. Charles P. Nemeth, professor and director of criminal justice and director of the Center for Criminal Justice, Law and Ethics. "Aside from our privilege to partner with such a great law school, the arrangement supports our overall mission — to prepare our graduates to enter into the various occupations of criminal justice, which naturally includes lawyers, judges, prosecutors and public defenders. Franciscan University and the Department of Criminal Justice hope this is the beginning of a long and beneficial relationship."

JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY

"With Akron Law's nationally renowned strength in Intellectual Property Law and its affordable tuition, JCU is excited about this new opportunity for our students," stated Dr. Rodney Hessinger, JCU interim dean, College of Arts and Sciences. "With JCU's own new Law and Society minor priming students for legal study, we anticipate we will be able to send even greater numbers of students to Akron in the future."

WILBERFORCE UNIVERSITY

"The importance of having Black lawyers in our society cannot be overstated," said Wilberforce President Vann R. Newkirk. "Black attorneys bring essential cultural perspectives to the legal system and ensure representation from historically underserved and underrepresented communities. This partnership further ensures that our students are equipped to make meaningful contributions to the legal profession and to the fight for a more just society."

AKRON LAW REVIEW HIGHLIGHTS



Bei Johnson '25

"High-Tech Industries' Global Resource Utilization and Transaction Cost Economics"

Johnson's analysis explores the challenges high-tech industries face in navigating the complexities of global resource utilization, focusing on how transaction costs impact investment risks and long-term sustainability in the aerospace industry. Through the lens of Transaction Cost Economics (TCE), the article identifies the intricate factors—including inherent uncertainties and complexities—that contribute to market barriers and execution challenges. To address these, the article highlights the influence of legal frameworks and execution planning in improving long-term outcomes, as well as other proactive, comprehensive approaches to decision-making and strategy development.

"This note is a reflective exploration and analytical extension of key concepts studied in several insightful business law courses offered at Akron Law, including Law & Economics and International Negotiations. I am deeply grateful to my faculty advisors, Professor Patrick Gaughan and Professor Sarah Starnes, for their invaluable guidance and mentorship. I also sincerely appreciate the inspiration and collaborative spirit of my exceptional Akron Law Review peers."



Insun Park '25

"Beyond the Face: Examining Legal Regulations for Law Enforcement Facial Recognition Technology"

As advanced technologies are increasingly integrated into the criminal legal system, Park examines the implications

of facial recognition technology from a multidisciplinary perspective by combining legal perspective and its broader impact on society. The note incorporated insights from domestic scholarship and international examples of regulating biometric privacy and algorithmic transparency.

"This was my first attempt at engaging in legal scholarship, and I hope to continue learning and researching the intersection of new technology and the criminal legal system," said Park. "I would like to thank my student mentor Tyler Speer '24, faculty advisors Michael Gentithes and Sarah Starnes, and Judge Charles E. Fleming of the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio for their help, guidance and advice on the note."

NATIONAL CIVIL TRIAL COMPETITION

The Greene Broillet & Wheeler National Civil Trial Competition (NCTC) is an invitational tournament open to all ABA-accredited law schools that have demonstrated excellence in mock trial competitions and/or demonstrated excellence in the training of law students in litigation skills. In fall 2023, Akron Law students Casey Ruppen '24, Josie Forney '25, Emma Hall '24, and Alyssa Pijanowski '24, won a highly contested round against Cumberland School of Law to bring the championship back to Akron for the first time since 2007. The team was coached to the championship by attorneys David Oeschger '09 and John Conley '08, who was on the winning NCTC team in 2007, as well as head coach Kevin Kita '11.

We asked the students and alumni to tell us how they felt about their time on the Akron Law Trial Team as well as their win at NCTC.

Josie Forney, returning to Kohrman Jackson Krantz after the July bar exam, said, "I am so grateful for the opportunity to compete in the National Civil Trial Competition. I truly could not have asked for a better experience. As a team, we were always refining our materials and practicing together outside of our regular practice times. Our coaches provided unwavering support and invaluable



The team poses with coaches John Conley '08 (second from left) and David Oeschger '09 (far right).



Flying the trophy back to Akron Law, the team said people in the Los Angeles Airport would applaud them without knowing what they won.

guidance throughout the entire season. Competing in the final round of the NCTC and hearing the announcement of our victory is a moment I will forever cherish—without a doubt, one of the highlights of my life and my law school journey. This experience has shaped us all into stronger advocates, and again, we could not have done it without our coaches."

Emma Hall, returning to Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office after the February bar exam, said, "Preparing for and winning NCTC was the single most formative part of law school for me. All of the coaches for Akron Law's Trial Team put in countless hours of mentorship and coaching to help us be confident, not only when we walked into a competition but in our future careers as trial attorneys when we start practicing."

Alyssa Pijanowski, associate attorney at Gallagher Sharp LLP, said, "I cannot even put into words the feeling of winning a national championship against the top trial advocacy team in the country. It would not have been possible without the dedication of our coaches and each member of the team. I will always remember the countless hours every weekend preparing and would not have wanted to do it with anyone else. My favorite part of the competition was that no two trials felt the same. Every team we competed against had its own style and we had to

learn on our feet how to effectively combat them... and we could. We knew the case like the back of our hand, and it showed. I am truly grateful for what being a part of Akron's Trial Team has done for me as a person and for my career. I would not be the advocate I am today without it."

Casey Ruppen, associate attorney at Perantinos & Nolan, Co., L.P.A., said, "Outside of working, competing in Trial Team has better-prepared me to practice law than any other activity, class or seminar ever could. While I was competing, I was also working on average 20-30 hours a week, in addition to my course load. I was constantly juggling work, schoolwork and Trial Team. It was



(L-R) Josie Forney '25, Alyssa Pijanowski '24, Emma Hall '24, and Casey Ruppen '24 pose with the NCTC trophy in Los Angeles.

a challenge but looking back I would not change it. Not only was I, along with an incredibly talented team, able to win a national championship, but I have a better understanding of the time management necessary to practice law. Law school alone doesn't do that.

The University of Akron's School of Law Trial Team coaches are second to none. They spend their time to ensure that they are putting forward the best-prepared team they possibly can, all while coaching the teams to be better, well-rounded attorneys. It is an experience I would recommend to anyone, and especially to those interested in trial work."

Congratulations again to this team and their coaches for bringing the NCTC 2023 national championship home to Akron Law!

REFLECTIONS OF THE 2007 NATIONAL CIVIL TRIAL COMPETITION (NCTC 2007)

John Conley '08, Ryan Melewski '09, Julie Grant '09 and Matthew Bruce '08 secured a hard-fought victory for The University of Akron School of Law in the 2007 National Civil Trial Competition (NCTC). Under the expert guidance of coaches Larry Sutter '89 and Adam Stacy '04, the Akron Law team battled some of the nation's top trial advocates in Los Angeles, Calif., proving their skills in the courtroom and emerging as champions. The victory proved the students' skills in the courtroom and put the school on the national map of trial advocacy, where it continues to this day.

Now, nearly 20 years after their triumph, a few of the winning team members reflect on their intense preparation, the challenges they faced and the unforgettable moments that led to their success.



John Conley, now partner in the Akron and Cleveland offices of Lewis Brisbois, said that "the National Civil Trial Competition is a prestigious invitational tournament that pits 16 of the country's top trial advocacy programs against one another. I was a member of the trial team that won the 2007 NCTC competition and I was named Best Advocate. I've coached a team or two almost every year since 2007, and I, along with David Oeschger '09, coached the 2023 team that won NCTC. As advocates on the 2007 NCTC

team, we prepared like crazy, knew our material and objectives inside and out, and, as such, were in the best possible position to meet and manage the myriad of obstacles and challenges that arise in a real-time trial proceeding. As a coach of the 2023 NCTC team, I was impressed by, and exceedingly proud of, the dedication, determination and raw talent my students exhibited."



Julie Grant, now host of "Opening Statements with Julie Grant" on Court TV, which airs weekday mornings at 8 a.m. EST, said, "Winning the 2007 National Civil Trial Competition was incredible! We spent countless hours mastering our case — and it showed. I'm grateful and humbled to be part of Larry Sutter's lasting legacy of helping to make Akron Law one of the top trial advocacy schools in the country.

After graduating, I went on to serve as an assistant district attorney and earn my LL.M. in trial advocacy with honors. People who watch my show often tell me how impressed they are with my trial expertise. I tell them it certainly didn't come overnight, but it all began when I joined the Akron Law Trial Team.

If you ask me, it's a fact that Akron Law produces trial attorneys of the highest caliber!"



Ryan Melewski, now partner at Rafidi, Pallante & Melewski LLC, said, "As a second-year law student, when you travel almost 2,500 miles to Los Angeles, you might expect to be a small fish in a big pond. But that is not true when you come from the Akron Trial Team Program. From the moment you step into a courtroom, schools from all over the country know that an Akron Trial Team is always a championship contender. In 2007, led by coaches Larry Sutter and Adam Stacy, our team competed over the course of three days against the top schools in the country. The war stories and memories from those trials will stay with me the rest of my life. Thanks to our coaches and my teammates, I can proudly say that we had some part in continuing Akron's tradition of excellence in trial advocacy by bringing home the 2007 NCTC Championship trophy."

The 2007 National Civil Trial Competition victory stands as more than a championship win but a testament to the dedication, preparation and exceptional advocacy skills instilled by The University of Akron School of Law's trial team program.

Today, successes like these continue to inspire new generations of Akron trial advocates, proving that excellence in the courtroom is a lasting tradition.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE COURTROOM: NOTABLE TRIAL TEAM AND MOOT COURT MEMORIES



The University of Akron School of Law's Trial and Moot Court Competition teams have long been a cornerstone of legal excellence and experiential learning opportunities for aspiring attorneys. From their origins to today, the teams have built a legacy of skill, dedication and success, producing students and alumni alike who have gone on to excel in the legal profession. Here are some reflections from former team members on the enduring impact of the programs on their present legal careers.



Plakas Mannos Ltd. attorney **Lee Plakas '76** has been involved in hundreds of civil jury trials during his career in both state and federal courts. His record of trial success is unique in the broad spectrum of cases in which he secured multi-million dollar verdicts.

His trial advocacy success was shaped by his time as a member of the Akron Law Trial Team, a legacy he upholds through financial contributions, mentorship of current members and unwavering support of experiential learning and trial advocacy.

“Some lessons can only be learned in the crucible of the courtroom. Akron’s trial team gives students an invaluable opportunity to learn these lessons early, and better prepares the trial team participants to be excellent advocates for their future clients.”

Lee Plakas
Trial Team



Megan Frantz Oldham '05, a Plakas Mannos Ltd partner, has been certified as a civil trial advocate by the National Board of Trial Advocacy since 2020 and is one of only five females in the State of Ohio certified in civil trial advocacy.

While in law school, she was an associate editor for the law review. She additionally was involved in moot court and was a member of the Akron Law trial team, which advanced to the 2005 ATLA National Student Trial Advocacy Competition quarterfinals.

“Every day, our goal as lawyers is to achieve truth and justice for our clients. Trial team is one of the best ways to learn how to be a trial lawyer, and to equip yourself for the court room and a career seeking that truth and justice on behalf of your clients.”

Megan Frantz Oldham
Trial Team



Megan Parker '23, intellectual property associate at Benesch Law, graduated in May 2023 from Akron Law. Now an associate, Parker focuses her practice on intellectual property litigation and artificial intelligence (AI), boasting a robust background in legal research and writing. Parker’s practice covers both litigation and counseling work.

During her time in law school, she served as a Legal Analysis Research and Writing (LARW) Fellow, worked in the Akron Law Trademark Clinic and was the associate editor of the Akron Law Review. She also represented Akron Law at the nationals for the ABA National Appellate Advocacy Competition in 2022.

“Competing with one of my best friends and now colleagues, Kristo Pantelides '22, was one of the most rewarding experiences I gained in law school. Moot Court helped me gain practical legal writing and advocacy experience that I use every day as an attorney.”

Megan C. Parker
Moot Court Team



Imokhai Okolo '20, managing partner of The Okolo Law Firm LLC, is an experienced trial attorney with expertise in litigation and client counseling. Okolo earned the title of mock trial national champion in 2020. As a then-graduating third year (3L), Okolo finished in the No. 1 spot in the country out of a total of 170 competitors from 67 law schools in the first-ever National Online Trial Advocacy Competition.

“My participation in The University of Akron Trial Team program has had a profound impact on my career. As a trial lawyer, I often lean on the skills and techniques I learned during my time in the program. The program set me up for great success. From adding value to multiple trial teams while working for a global law firm to now leading my own private practice and winning jury trials, the trial team program prepared me to hit the ground running after passing the bar and entering the practice of law.”

Imokhai Okolo
Trial Team



As a trusts and estates associate attorney, **Ellison Starnes '23** assists individuals, families and beneficiaries with their estate planning and administration needs which includes, wills, trusts, powers of attorney, health care directives and probate administration. A 2023 Akron Law graduate, she was a member of the Moot Court Honor Society and competed at the Thurgood Marshall Moot Court Competition in 2022. She reflects on the experience, citing the meaningful opportunity and exposure the program brought her.

“My participation in the Akron Law Moot Court Honor Society and my performance at the Thurgood Marshall Moot Court Competition in 2022 provided me with meaningful exposure and opportunity to draft briefs and present myself in front of judges and attorneys to be critiqued on my legal writing and oral argument skills. I believe the process of writing the brief and preparing for oral arguments is a great supplement to the already robust legal writing department at Akron Law.”

Ellison Starnes
Moot Court Team



Bradley Hough '21 is an associate in the Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease LLP Akron office and a member of the intellectual property (IP) group. He focuses his practice on intellectual property, helping clients with patents, trademarks, and other issues. Before graduating in 2021, Hough served as a member and team manager for the Akron Law Patent Moot Court Team. During his experience, he went on to secure a position in the Top 4 in Best Brief and Overall Competition at the Giles Sutherland Rich Patent Regional Moot Court Competition semi-finals in 2020. Hough reflects on the enriching program and the skills he earned through the competition experience.

“Competing in the Giles Sutherland Rich Moot Court Competition was a defining law school experience. Arguing before judges sharpened my ability to think quickly and communicate persuasively. I’m proud of our team’s accomplishment in reaching the semi-finals. Moot court deepened my skills in both written and verbal advocacy.”

Bradley Hough
Moot Court Team

AKRON LAW TRIAL TEAM COMPETES IN AAJ STUDENT TRIAL ADVOCACY FINALS IN ATLANTA

The Akron Law Trial Team represented the School of Law in the national American Association for Justice Student Trial Advocacy (AAJ) competition, which was held April 3-6 in Atlanta.

The team, which was made up of Josie Forney '25, Valeria Walker '26, Delayna Durr '25 and Haley Chester '26, advanced to the national competition after winning the regional round in

March. At nationals, the team went 2-1 in the preliminary rounds, narrowly missing the cut to make the top eight.

The AAJ team was coached by Tony Wise '13, Rachael Kisner '24, Lauren Coriell '19 and Kevin Kita '11. Thank you to Kisling, Nestico & Redick for their generous sponsorship of the AAJ competition team’s trip to Atlanta for the finals.



(L-R) Josie Forney, Valeria Walker, Delayna Durr and Haley Chester pose at the AAJ Regional Championship in Philadelphia.



AKRON LAW TRIAL TEAM RECORDS OAG WIN



On Nov. 22, 2024, the Akron Law Trial Team won the Ohio Attorney General (OAG) Competition in Columbus. In addition to the overall win, Jeremy Golub '25 was awarded best witness round 1 and best advocate round 2, and Gene Valentino '26 was awarded best advocate round 1 and best witness round 2.

The team consisted of Golub, Erin Lynn '26, Hayley Bunner '26, and Valentino. The students were coached by Austin Nagy '21 and Ryan Cash '21.

AKRON LAW MOOT COURT TEAM COMPETES IN COLUMBUS COMPETITION

The Akron Law Moot Court Team competed in the National Child Welfare & Adoption Law Competition in Columbus, OH which was held March 15, 2025. Brianna Gleghorn '26, Tommy Wyatt '26, and Grace Metheny '26 competed on behalf of Akron Law. Metheny placed in the Top 10 oralists at the competition.



(L-R) Brianna Gleghorn '26, Tommy Wyatt '26, and Grace Metheny '26



Grace Metheny '26

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



JASMINE OESTERLING '25
American Society of Comparative Law 2024 Annual Conference in Fort Worth, Texas

In October 2024, Jasmine Oesterling attended the American Society of Comparative Law 2024 Annual Conference, where she presented her paper, "I Can't Breathe: A Comparison of Racial Inequity and Police Brutality Observed in France and the United States," on the Criminal Law Panel of the Younger Comparativist's Committee (YCC).

During the conference, Oesterling's paper was awarded the Phanor J. Eder Prize in Comparative Law. She said, "It was a true honor to accept an award named after someone whose publications in the field have inspired so many." The Phanor J. Eder Prize is named after the first president of the American Society of Comparative Law. It is awarded in recognition of the best paper written by an undergraduate law student, J.D. or LL.B., in response to the Call for Papers for every annual meeting of the YCC.



MAXIMILIAN SILVIA '25
Forbes 30 Under 30 Summit in Cincinnati, Ohio

In September 2024, Max Silvia was invited to attend the Forbes 30 Under 30 Summit, a 3-day immersive experience. Events included networking with other young professionals, concerts from XANDRA, Shaboozey, and Metro Boomin, and speeches from notable figures such as Jon Husted, then-Lt. Governor of Ohio, and Joe Buck, the renowned Monday Night Football commentator, as well as University of Miami women's basketball players Haley and Hanna Cavinder, who are the co-founders of Hustle Beauty. The summit concluded with a spotlight performance by Rupi Kaur and a talk from Grammy-nominated artist Big Sean, who discussed balancing mental health and success.

Silvia appreciated the opportunity to network with people in different industries and to hear all of the advice provided by the speakers, which he felt could apply to everyone, not just young entrepreneurs.



SAI PANDRANGI '25
American Bar Association Annual Conference in Chicago, IL and Midyear Meeting in Phoenix

In August 2024, Sai Pandrangi represented The University of Akron School of Law at the 2024 ABA Annual Conference. Attending this conference with other student leaders from across the country allowed for insightful discussions. Topics included the role of a school's Student Bar Association to better serve and encourage the student body to be a member of their institution and legal community while also not sacrificing their mental health or school-life balance. Pandrangi said, "Thank you to the ABA and everyone involved in making this experience unforgettable. Additionally, a big thank you to Dean Andrew Costigan and the administration for their assistance in ensuring that The University of Akron School of Law was represented at the conference."

In January 2025, he headed to Phoenix, Ariz., for the ABA's Midyear meeting. While there, Pandrangi participated in the conference's ABA Young Lawyer Division (YLD) Opening Statement Competition. Contestants were provided a case file one week prior to the competition and were expected to prepare a 7-10 minute opening statement. Pandrangi ultimately won Top Plaintiff Score.



DEVIN OWENS '25
Note shared by Intellectual Property news blog PatentlyO

In March, Devin Owens' note "Artificial intelligence models may not have owners" was shared by PatentlyO as part of a compilation titled, "OpenEvidence v. pathway: the legal battle over AI reverse engineering."

Owens said, "I was so surprised and grateful to be mentioned in PatentlyO. My article predicted last year that we would see a new type of lawsuit over attempts to reverse-engineer artificial intelligence models by extraction attacks, which are techniques that try to copy the model's internal workings with information gleaned from queries. Seeing the first suit actually get filed was a trip. I'm looking forward to seeing how these suits might challenge intellectual property law to address profound questions about the nature of ownership and authorship that we haven't had to confront before the age of deep learning AI models. Does anyone own an AI model that was created by an algorithm and trained on the work of millions of humans? We'll find out."



ELIZABETH GROSSMAN '27
Published on Techdirt

In March, Grossman published her op-ed titled, "The ADL's misguided attack on Steam," focusing on the Anti-Defamation League's report "Steam-powered hate," which accused a game launcher of fostering extremism.

Grossman said, "It has been so exciting throughout the writing and editing process to be able to combine the legal education I am pursuing with my experiences in esports and gaming. I am incredibly passionate about keeping government regulation out of the gaming space and making sure those who are critical of the space understand the space they are criticizing. I want to thank Professor Jess Miers for reading so many drafts of this op-ed and encouraging me to get it out into the world."



JULIA DIBEASE '26, KATE FULTON '26, ERYAN MACK '26, TOM NIKOLAI '26, AND MICHAEL MEEHAN '26
University of Akron Intramural Tournament

In February, the Akron Law team "Justice is Served" won the University of Akron's intramural volleyball tournament. Also, on the team were 2Ls Anna Zumber and Shayela Harmon (not pictured). Brennan Chivers (undergrad) is also pictured.

FEDERALIST SOCIETY

James Madison Award for Best FedSoc Chapter of the Year

Akron Law's Federalist Society Chapter won the James Madison Award for Best FedSoc Chapter of the Year at the National Student Symposium hosted in Michigan. This was the first time the chapter has won an award.

"We are proud to bring this award home to The University of Akron School of Law. We could not have done it without the support of our wonderful faculty and dedicated members, who, as this honor shows, are on-par with students at the nation's top law schools," said Federalist Society President Dan Szuba '26 and Vice President Blake Shiplett '26.



THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON SCHOOL OF LAW ACQUIRES IRIS AIR PROFESSIONAL PHOTO BOOTH

Preparing for a future legal career can be a challenging journey for any law student. Among the many important milestones along the way, obtaining a professional headshot is a crucial step in building a strong personal brand and making a lasting impression.

The University of Akron School of Law students, faculty, staff and alumni now have access to a unique and cutting-edge resource, as Akron Law has become the first law school in Ohio to offer the Iris Air Photo Booth, a state-of-the-art, do-it-yourself professional headshot machine.

The Iris Air Professional Photo Booth utilizes technology and innovation to support professional development while reducing stress and financial barriers. Iris is easy to use – with just a few taps on a touchscreen, students can quickly acquire high-quality headshots, complete with pose suggestions and editing tools, all at no cost. Headshots are then immediately emailed to the user and remain accessible for one year. “Iris allows students to easily create a professional image for LinkedIn, Symplicity profiles, or even when featured in legal publications or conferences,” said Emily Janoski-Haehlen, dean of The University of Akron School of Law. “The booth directly meets the needs of our law students and alumni, and I’m grateful we can empower our Akron Law community with this service.”

The Iris Air booth is centrally located on the second floor of the School of Law off the Veterans’ Lounge near the vending machines and Career Closet. The booth is equipped with simple instructions guiding users through



Students pose in front of the Iris Air Professional Photo Booth.

the process of taking professional headshots.

The Iris Air booth, made possible through the generous support of the Beatrice K. McDowell Family Fund, is available free of charge to all Akron Law students, alumni, faculty and staff during School of Law operating hours. It will be featured at future fairs and events.

“Before Iris, students could only access free headshots during specific events like career fairs or graduate fairs,” said Alisa Benedict O’Brien, assistant dean of career services, strategic initiatives and external affairs, who played a key role in bringing the device to the School of Law. “These events were limited in scope and timing. We wanted to

create a convenient, accessible and cost-free option that would allow students to get headshots whenever they need them—whether for job applications, interviews or other professional opportunities. This service not only alleviates stress but also saves students the expense of hiring a professional photographer.”

PROFESSIONALISM WEEK



Love Your Career Fair presented by the Career Services Office

In fall 2023 The University of Akron School of Law faculty adopted a mandatory 12 credit-hour Professionalism Training graduation requirement, which is designed to foster student professional development and to meet accreditation requirements. With this program, students have frequent opportunities to develop their professional identity, starting in the first year. Inspired by this, Akron Law hosted its inaugural Professionalism Week in October 2024 with events focused on building law student professional identity and connections in the legal field.

MONDAY, OCT. 21

Students were invited to join classmates, faculty and staff in the Beatrice K. McDowell Common for treats, giveaways, raffles and reflection on what it means to be “professional.”

TUESDAY, OCT. 22

Students joined first-generation attorneys at Roetzel and Andress for a panel titled “Lunch and Learn: Thriving as a First Gen Lawyer.” Part-time student Joey Martinez ’27, who attended the panel at Roetzel and Andress, said, “Attending the lunch and learn at Roetzel was an extremely beneficial experience for me as a nontraditional, first-gen law student. Having spent over 12 years working in manufacturing, I had never even been inside a law firm. Everyone at Roetzel was so accommodating and the panel demystified what to expect when I receive my law license and pursue the practice of law. I also received valuable advice about how to thrive in law school and strike a balance between my studies and spending quality time with my incredibly supportive husband and all of our family and friends.”

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 23

Both the day and evening programs were invited to participate in a Client Counseling Exercise led by Professor Charles Oldfield in the Legal Writing Suite. Shayela Harmon ’26 attended the workshop and said, “The client counseling workshop offered great insight into what it is like to talk to a client and gather information regarding a case. The workshop demonstrated the need to ask precise questions and establish a rapport with a potential client in a professional manner. I feel more prepared for future client engagements as a result of the workshop.”

THURSDAY, OCT. 24

Students were able to participate in two events. The Love Your Career Expo, hosted by the Office of Career Services, gave them the opportunity to explore different practice areas and careers.

More than 15 different practice areas were represented in addition to the Akron Bar, Cleveland Metropolitan Bar and Ohio State Bar Associations. In the afternoon, students were invited to attend the fall Miller Becker Center lecture presented by Texas A&M Law Professor Susan Fortney titled “The Role of Proactive Regulation in Assisting Lawyers and Promoting Public Protection.”



Jack Sahl, Akron Law Professor Emeritus; Joseph Caligiuri, Ohio Disciplinary Counsel; Susan Fortney, Texas A&M Professor and Miller Becker Distinguished Guest Lecturer; Heather Zirke, Director of the Miller Becker Center for Professional Responsibility; Elisabeth Duesler, Office of Disciplinary Counsel.

FRIDAY, OCT. 25

To conclude Professionalism Week, students were invited to attend and network with lawyers from across the state who were attending the Miller Becker Center’s annual seminar in partnership with the Office of Disciplinary Counsel and the Board of Professional Conduct of the Supreme Court of Ohio. Fortney gave the keynote address to an audience of more than 150 lawyers from across the state who work or volunteer in Ohio’s lawyer regulatory process.

Thank you to all who participated in our first Professionalism Week and made it a success for the law students.

A LASTING LEGAL LEGACY: CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF A. SAMUEL ODDI



served as a visiting professor at University of California's Davis College of Law, The Ohio State University School of Law, and University of Pittsburgh School of Law.

He served as a patent attorney at Westinghouse Electric Corporation and as patent counsel at Rockwell International Corporation, both in Pittsburgh, Pa. He also held the role of senior legal officer at the World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. Oddi was admitted to practice law in Illinois and Pennsylvania, as well as before the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Oddi also made numerous contributions to law literature as he published many intellectual property and torts articles, including "The Regeneration of American Patent Law: Patentable Subject Matter," 46 IDEA 491-560 (2006) and "Patent Attorney Malpractice: An Oxymoron No More," 2004 U. Ill. J. L., Tech. & Pol'y 1-72 (2004).

As we remember Samuel Oddi and his profound contributions to the field of intellectual property, his legal legacy reaches far beyond the books. One person who knew Professor Oddi well and shared his commitment to The University of Akron School of Law is Carolyn Dessin, a dear friend and Akron Law faculty member. Dessin worked alongside Oddi for many years, witnessing his dedication and impact firsthand, and

offering a unique perspective on his enduring influence as a teacher.

"Sam was a dedicated and rigorous teacher," Dessin said, "He believed that fear was an excellent motivator, as many of his torts students will attest. But among his upper-class students, many came to know him as gentle and caring - the true Sam!"

Dessin also shared that Oddi's life included many diverse interests and hobbies, including travel. "Sam and [wife] Lorrie loved to travel," Dessin reminisced. "I was lucky enough to spend time



with them in Geneva and Nice, and we had many wonderful adventures and meals. Sam was a true gourmet. We'd walk the streets in the morning to see which restaurant had the most interesting plat du jour [dish of the day]. I think that he loved the exploration as much as the meal!"

In addition to food and travel, Dessin said music was another passion for Oddi. "Sam and Lorrie loved classical music, especially opera,"

Dessin said. "They were longtime subscribers to the Lyric Opera in Chicago. They also spent time in Sirmiglione, Italy, and went to the opera in Verona. Sam could tell you the plot of just about any opera."

As we honor Oddi's life, his profound impact on intellectual property law and education shines as a lasting testament to his excellence. Equally enduring, however, are the personal connections he fostered, the joy he brought to those around him and the countless lives he enriched. Oddi's influence extends far beyond the realm of law,

leaving a deep imprint on the hearts of all who had the privilege to know him.

His career was distinguished by groundbreaking contributions to his field and shaped by his unwavering dedication to his students. He will be deeply missed and fondly remembered by his family, friends, Akron Law colleagues, students and all whose lives were touched by his remarkable and fulfilling legacy.

OTHER FACULTY AND STAFF NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS TO MARGERY M. KOOSSED, PROFESSOR OF LAW EMERITA!



Professor Emerita Margery M. Koosed is the recipient of The Schumacher-Ketcham Lifesaver Award given by the Ohio Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (OACDL). This distinguished accolade, named in tribute of OACDL leaders Don Schumacher and Richard (Rick) Ketcham, recognizes excellence and outstanding achievement in

capital litigation, including trials, mitigation, appeals, post-conviction work and education.

After an extraordinary 50-year tenure at The University of Akron School of Law as the Aileen McMurray Trusler Professor in Public Interest Law, Koosed retired from teaching but continues her impactful leadership and service in the community and with public service

organizations statewide. Congratulations on this remarkable and well-deserved recognition, Margery!

JENNIFER BROWNING APPOINTED AS ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS



The University of Akron School of Law has appointed Jennifer Browning as the Assistant Director of Admissions. In this role, Assistant Director Browning will engage with prospective students, support the law school's recruitment efforts, and manage the law school's admissions processes.

Jennifer is a proud Zip, having earned her Bachelor of Arts in Music Education and Voice in 2007, followed by a Master's degree in School and Guidance Counseling in 2013, both from The University of Akron. With a strong foundation in education and student counseling, Jennifer brings a wealth of experience to her new role. She spent nine years as a School Counselor at Ravenna High School, where she provided academic and personal support to students, while also developing impactful programs such as military recruiting initiatives, clothing and laundry assistance programs, and multiple student organizations. Additionally, Jennifer played a key role in organizing major school events, including Prom, Homecoming, and Awards Ceremonies, fostering a

positive and engaging school culture. In addition to her educational background, Jennifer is a professional singer and actress with extensive performance experience in Northeast Ohio and Europe. She is deeply committed to Akron's arts community and is an advocate for its vibrant local music and arts scene. Jennifer is currently performing with the Euclid Symphony Orchestra.

Outside of her professional work, Jennifer is a passionate cook who loves exploring diverse culinary traditions. She believes that food is a universal language, connecting people across cultures. Jennifer's personal connection to The University of Akron runs deep, as her son will be joining the University this fall, further strengthening

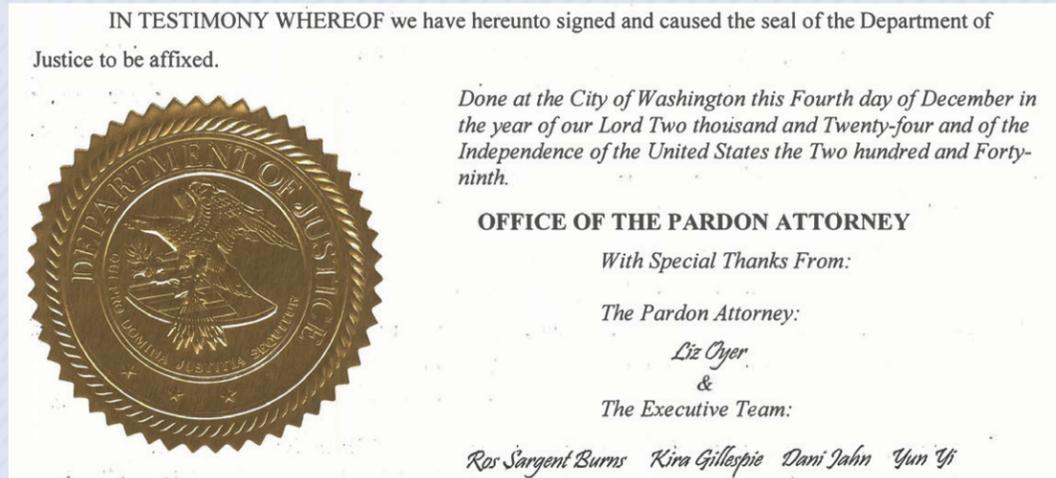
her commitment to the Zips family.

Jennifer is excited to work with prospective law students, helping them navigate the admissions process and realize their aspirations of pursuing a legal education. With her background in education, counseling, and the performing arts, she is uniquely equipped to support students in achieving their goals.

"I am excited to be a part of The University of Akron School of Law, where I can help prospective students turn their dreams of becoming legal professionals into a reality. I look forward to guiding students through the admissions process and beyond, igniting their passion for law school and helping them navigate this exciting journey," says Jennifer.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: G. BEN COHEN

COHEN'S EXPERIENCE AS SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE PARDON ATTORNEY IN THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE



Close up of a Pardon Grant of Clemency gifted to Cohen at the conclusion of his term as special advisor,

From 2023 through the end of 2024, Professor G. Ben Cohen served as a special advisor to the pardon attorney in the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ). In this volunteer role, Cohen reviewed applications for clemency and gave advice to the pardon attorney. Based on their review, Cohen and other lawyers at the Office of the Pardon Attorney would make recommendations to the pardon attorney who would, in turn, make a recommendation to the U.S. attorney general and the president. When Cohen began in this role, it was part of an effort by the DOJ to address a backlog of around 14,000 pending petitions. During his time as a special advisor, the office received nearly 4,000 applications for clemency.

The bulk of Cohen's work involved review of two bases for clemency outlined in the DOJ guidelines: cases in which

the grounds for clemency were based on exceptional rehabilitation and meritorious service by the petitioner, and those based on the disparity or undue severity of the sentence. Many petitions based upon disparity, or the undue severity of sentence arose based upon new laws passed by the Congress. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, after the crack cocaine epidemic of prior decades, Congress passed laws imposing harsh sentences for crack offenses and there were major disparities in sentencing laws regarding crack and cocaine possession. As society recognized the harshness of those sentences and underlying racial disparities in sentencing, Congress passed, during former President Barack Obama's and President Donald Trump's first administrations, a series of laws that reduced punishment for these offenses. However, many of the changes

were not retroactive so there was a whole pool of petitioners who were sentenced to life or life-equivalent sentences that receive lesser punishment today. The Office of the Pardon Attorney reviewed each of these applications thoroughly, regardless of the grounds for clemency that might apply, to ensure that anyone who had a substantial case for clemency moved forward in the process.

By the close of his administration, former President Joe Biden had denied clemency petitions for 10,375 individuals and commuted the sentences of 4,033 petitions for clemency, including 36 grants of clemency for individuals sentenced to death. Due to juggling his work with his teaching, Cohen said that he worked on the smallest percentage of these cases. But Cohen said each case, even in the memoranda that he wrote recommending denial of a

clemency petition, reflected the office's commitment to fairly and responsibly administering the executive clemency process. The benefits to a recipient of clemency might seem obvious. For those on death row, clemency allowed the petitioners to avoid execution. For those whose sentences were reduced, the action allowed petitioners to return to their families and communities. But there are benefits for the government and the broader justice system in these cases as well. Beyond the cost savings of releasing someone from incarceration, there was also the matter of legitimacy. "The justice system as a whole falls into ill repute when there are excessive and unjustified sentencings," said Cohen. "That's the work of the Office of the Pardon Attorney - to try to redeem, in a systematic and fair way, problems in the justice system so that the broader public has respect for and appreciation of the criminal legal system."

Ultimately, Cohen came away from his time in the Office of Pardon Attorney with profound respect for people working in government. "The U.S. Attorneys and their offices, the folks at the Department of Justice and the Office of the Pardon Attorney all paid close and thoughtful attention to the details of each petitioner, the crime that they had committed, and really cared about each one of the cases," he said.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: JESS MIERS

FROM GOOGLE AND AMICUS BRIEFS TO UA: HOW A NONTRADITIONAL CAREER PATH CAN YIELD INTERESTING AND MEANINGFUL WORK



Professor Jess Miers poses with the iconic "G" at Google in Mountain View, CA where she worked from June 2020 through November 2022

Jess Miers, a visiting assistant professor of law at The University of Akron School of Law, opted for a non-traditional career track in the world of law. Yet it's a path that more and more individuals are considering as an avenue to a legal career.

Miers has taken advantage of a career track known as J.D. Advantage. According to the National Association of Law Placement (NALP), this is a term used to describe a category of jobs for which bar passage is not required but for which a Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree provides a distinct advantage.

After graduating from Santa Clara University School

of Law in 2021, where she also received the Tech Edge J.D. certificate, Miers started in a J.D. Advantage role at Google, where she was a senior government affairs and public policy analyst. Her responsibilities included advising internal and external stakeholders on U.S. intermediary liability law topics such as state and federal content regulations, intellectual property and online marketplace issues.

Miers's Google position served as a springboard for her next role as in-house counsel for the Chamber of Progress, a technology trade organization. Her work there centered around writing amicus briefs

for some of the organization's 30-plus technology company partners. In instances where one of the partner companies was being sued, or if they themselves were bringing a suit related to the technology issues in Miers's portfolio, she would be tasked with writing an amicus brief. These briefs serve as an expert report for the court in which the suit was brought, giving the court a bigger picture as to the impact the issues in the suit might have on those other than the parties in the case.

Miers even had the opportunity to submit amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court. One such brief, *Brief for Amici Curiae in Support of Respondents, NetChoice & CCIA v. Moody, Paxton*, (U.S. Dec. 7, 2023), outlined the many ways that HB 20 and SB 7072 would have undermined free speech protections previously put in place related to the moderation of website content. In another case, since becoming a professor at Akron Law, Miers contributed to a brief on a topic that has garnered a great deal of attention in recent months - *Brief for Amici Curiae in Support of Petitioner, TikTok v. Garland*, (U.S. Dec. 27, 2024). This brief argued that the government's attempt to ban TikTok in the United States is unconstitutional, likening TikTok to a "modern-day public square." This is especially the case since, as noted in the brief, "millions of Americans use TikTok daily to express

political, social and economic views."

At UA, where she has been since 2024, Miers focuses on the intersection of law and technology, with recent research and scholarship centered on Generative AI. She is recognized as an expert in U.S. online intermediary liability law and has extensively written, spoken and taught about issues such as online speech and Section 230, content moderation, intellectual property and cybercrime.

Miers's previous professional experiences were instrumental in preparing Miers for the mentorship side of her new role as a professor. She is able to draw on her experience to help students take advantage of key opportunities in law school - from publishing in trade publications and law journals to securing specific kinds of internships and externships - that set them up for success in their post-law school job search. She knows what it takes to become a technology lawyer and can more effectively provide the hands-on mentorship that is often the key to Akron Law students' success.

For law students, Miers's journey is a valuable lesson - that the traditional post-J.D. career path at a law firm or in clerkships does not have to be for everyone. There are plenty of options and valuable opportunities for those who want to have an impact through law.

CLASS NOTES

2020s

Xul Perez '23, started a new position as a staff attorney at the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic at Community Legal Aid in Akron, Ohio. He assists low-income taxpayers facing IRS issues, educating them about their tax rights and responsibilities, and advocating for equitable tax policies.

David Robinson '22, has joined Critchfield, Critchfield & Johnston as an associate. He focuses his practice on corporate and business law, as well as real estate transactions.

Imokhai Okolo '20, has won the 2024 Ohio State Bar Foundation Community Service Award for Newer Attorneys.

2010s

Isabelle Bibet-Kalinyak '13, has joined Pullman & Comley, LLC, as a partner in its Health Care and Business and Finance practices, the law firm announced. Bibet-Kalinyak's focus will be on health care transactions involving private equity, physician groups, hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers, Management Services Organization (MSO) structuring, joint ventures, strategic partnerships and regulatory compliance.

Natasha Kennedy '13, was appointed by Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine to the Logan County Court of Common Pleas, Family Court.

Bryan Meek '15, partner at Brennan Manna Diamond, was named to the Crain's Cleveland Business 40 Under 40 2024 list.

Joseph A. Manno '14, was elected to the Tucker Ellis LLP partnership. Manno defends companies against claims alleging federal and state statutory liability, product liability, and general negligence in repeat, mass tort and individual high-stakes litigation.

Christopher Weeda '16, was inducted into the 21st class of the Salineville-Southern Local Athletic Hall of Fame.

Niki Ford '11, was announced partner of Baker McKenzie's tax practice in New York.



Isabelle Bibet-Kalinyak '13



Joseph A. Manno '14

2000s

Brian J. Downey '02, was announced as partner of the Fort Wayne law firm of Barrett McNagny LLP, effective Jan. 1, 2025. His practice areas are planning and administration. He assists clients with wills, trusts and strategies to minimize estate, inheritance and generation-skipping taxes as well as consults business

owners regarding the choice of entity issues, valuation issues, buy-sell agreements and business succession issues. Downey previously managed a successful estate-planning practice in Florida and is licensed to practice law in both Indiana and Florida.

Melissa Z. Kelly '03, was elected to the Tucker Ellis LLP partnership. Kelly advises clients on a variety of legal issues, including FLSA collective actions and employment discrimination, wrongful discharge, employee benefits cases, white collar criminal defense, product liability and environmental matters.

Cameron Frymyer '04, named Chief Financial Officer of Babcock & Wilcox Enterprises, Inc.

Ninth District Court of Appeals **Judge Jill Flagg Lanzinger '04**, is now serving as presiding judge.

Tara Treharn Keating '06, was appointed to The Anthony Spano Foundation Board of directors for a three-year term.

Michael M. Jolic, Esq. '10, has been recognized in Marquis Who's Who for his significant contributions to immigration law. As managing member and partner at Martin Jolic and Associates LLC (MJB Immigration), he specializes in healthcare immigration law, particularly J-1 visas. His achievements include securing waivers for the two-year home residency requirement and aiding underserved areas in the U.S. Notably, he advised Ohio on enhancing its J-1

waiver program and guided North Dakota in establishing its legal framework for such programs.



Brian J. Downey '02



Melissa Z. Kelly '03



Judge Jill Flagg Lanzinger '04



Tara Treharn Keating '06

1990s

Judge Scot Stevenson '92, now serves as administrative judge.

Darren L. Meade '94, has been appointed as The Village of Zaleski's solicitor.

Jeffrey Musellman '97, received the Boys & Girls Club of Wooster Founder's

Award for his many years of dedication to the club and his support to the organization since he joined the board in 2017.



Judge Scot Stevenson '92

1980s

Judge John Vavra '83, was honored with a lifetime achievement award at the Belmont County NAACP Freedom Fund Dinner.

Martin J. Boetcher '87, an employment and civil litigation lawyer with Harrington, Hoppe & Mitchell Ltd., has been named to the Ohio Super Lawyers list for 2025.

1970s

Terrence Ufholz '72, is the 2024 recipient of the Bradford "Buck" M. Gearing Professionalism Award.

Michael Lane '75, Tompkins County's longest-serving elected official, retired from the county legislature at the end of his term in December 2024. Lane served approximately 28 years, representing the villages of Dryden and Freeville.

In Memoriam



Theodore "Ted" Chuparkoff '62, born May 8, 1931, died Nov. 14, 2024. He was 93 years old. In 1955, Ted became a member of the prosecutor's office before shifting to private law practice. He practiced law for more than 50 years. Chuparkoff will be remembered for his relentless work ethic, dogged tenacity, love of the law and placing a high value on education.



John Daily '63, born Jan. 22, 1938, died on Dec. 12, 2024. Daily attended The University of Akron for his undergraduate and law degrees. Daily was a member of Lone Star Fraternity during his college years, and was also a founding member of the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. As an avid big game hunter, he hunted in North America, including Newfoundland and Alaska,

Mexico and Africa. Daily taught at Temple in 1964 and 1965 and was a practicing attorney in Akron for more than 50 years



William Mason Oldham '67, of Hudson, Ohio, died on Dec. 30, 2024. Raised in Silver Lake, Ohio, he graduated from Cuyahoga Falls High School in 1960 and earned his undergraduate and law degrees from The University of Akron. A distinguished lawyer, Oldham held leadership roles, including managing partner at Buckingham Doolittle and Burroughs and president of the Akron Bar Association. He was devoted to family, sports and community. Preceded in death by his wife of 54 years, Pat, he is survived by his children, grandchildren and extended family.



Michael Scala '76, died Oct. 28, 2024, from lung cancer. Scala's 47-year career was marked by dedicated service as a prosecutor in Warren

and Girard Municipal Courts and a private practice in personal injury and domestic law. He became a passionate advocate for single mothers, whom he felt were often treated unfairly by the Children Services Board. Scala's exceptional skill took him twice to the Supreme Court of Ohio, where he won both cases, reflecting his commitment to justice. His achievements included some of the rare directed verdicts and acquittals in Trumbull County, making him a respected figure in the legal community and a steadfast champion for his clients.



Anna Maria Barnum '77, (née Pfeiffer), born April 15, 1943, in Saco, Maine, died on Dec. 26, 2024. The daughter of Dr. Richard C. and Mary Margaret Pfeiffer, she is survived by daughters Rebecca Ellen Barnum (Rodney C. Rech) and Susannah Mary Barnum, grandson Erik Pfeiffer Rech, and sister Ellen Margaret Agnew.



Thomas Edward Infante '72, born June 4, 1939, in Youngstown, Ohio, died on Nov. 18, 2024. A proud veteran, he served in the Army Security Agency, where he studied Russian at the Army Language School before being stationed in Europe. After his honorable discharge, Infante returned to Youngstown to further his education, earning a bachelor's degree from Youngstown University and a master's degree in education from Westminster College.

Infante devoted much of his career to the Youngstown City school system, where he served as a teacher and basketball coach at East High School, his alma mater, and later taught at Stambaugh School. His dedication to education and leadership was evident as he advanced to assistant principal at Lincoln School and then principal at Roosevelt School.

Driven by a passion for learning, Infante continued postgraduate studies at Kent State University and ultimately earned a Juris Doctor degree from Akron Law.



Sr. Jane Ockuly CSJ '89, born to Anthony and Margaret Ockuly, who grew up in Berea and later moved to Cleveland, died on January 12, 2025. She attended Our Lady of the Angels and St. Joseph Academy, graduating in 1956. Influenced by the Sisters of St. Joseph and family ties, she joined the CSJs, becoming Sister Mary Thaddeus.

Jane earned degrees from St. John College and John Carroll University before serving as a teacher, principal, and finance director. Later, she pursued law, focusing on child advocacy. After retiring in 2007, she volunteered in literacy programs and at St. Joseph Academy.



Carol Kastner, died on February 17, 2025 surrounded by loved ones: daughter Amy Capeta (Michael), son Jeff Kastner (Sara), grandchildren Emily Martens (Ian), Nathaniel Capeta, and Matia Kastner, and sister Marcia Leinwand. Born in Jackson, Mich., she grew up in West Akron and raised her family in Green, Ohio. As an LPN, she selflessly cared for others beyond her duties. Preceded in death by her husband, Harley, her family celebrated her life privately. Donations may be made to The Harley & Carol Kastner Scholarship Fund at The University of Akron School of Law.

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