

Center for Excellence in Advocacy

“Fast and exciting.” Those are the words Professor Michael Kaye uses to describe the start of Washburn University School of Law’s new Center for Excellence in Advocacy. The Center, which was launched this fall to promote excellence in skilled ethical advocacy by joining the study of law with the insights, knowledge, and skills of the practicing bar, is directed by Michael Kaye. The Center involves faculty, students, and alumni in a collaborative effort.

At its core, the Center for Excellence in Advocacy serves law students and the profession by beginning the professional training of advocates—whether for the courtroom or the boardroom—from the day students enter Washburn Law. The Center is based on the tradition of Washburn Law students becoming involved in legal work in a variety of agencies, courts, and law offices. “Washburn Law students work as legal professionals well before graduation,” Kaye said. “They hold law clinic internships, externships in public defender offices, in private law offices representing some clients too poor to pay for legal services, in legal aid offices, and as law clerks to district judges.

“Learning to advocate, negotiate, and litigate need not wait until after law school graduation. Professors, practicing lawyers, judges, and students can start the training now,” he added. “The separation between skills training and doctrinal training and between law study and law practice is vanishing. When many law students reflect on their study of law these days, they also reflect on their experiences in the practice of law.”

Washburn has a long history of advocacy training. Many trial lawyers and judges received their legal training here, and they comprise a large, active, and supportive alumni base. Members of this talented group of practitioners teach a variety of elective courses—including advocacy skills courses—in the law school. The curriculum also includes legal drafting courses, simulation courses and strong clinic and externship programs.

Plans for this Center include an advanced evidence course to be offered next summer. Topics will include expert testimony, computerized and e-mail evidence, admissibility of evidence from web sites and other locations in cyberspace, and commercial litigation and white collar crime.



Professor Michael Kaye



A BUSY SCHEDULE

The Center’s fall schedule has been busy.

To date, it has

- hosted two CLE conferences for lawyers, judges, and law students on the effective use of electronic courtroom technology;
- conducted a “full trial” in-house trial competition to select members for two national trial competition teams;
- inaugurated Courtwatch, a learning-by-observing court-watching program in the U.S. District Court in Topeka;
- provided opportunities for students to meet Michael Manning ‘77, one of America’s top trial lawyers, who taught a trial advocacy class and a CLE class on using technology in trial;
- offered a program by Dr. Erik Mitchell, Shawnee County medical examiner on what lawyers can learn from autopsies; and
- presented a day-long CLE presentation: “Wielding High Tech Evidence Tools to Win Your Case: A Practical Guide to the Electronic Courtroom” featuring Kristen Thornbrugh ‘96 and Lynn Johnson ‘70.

Also active within the Center is the Washburn Advocacy Society, a school-wide organization. Members meet with outstanding lawyers and judges in a collegial atmosphere to learn the insights and inside knowledge of the successful practicing advocate. The Society also operates a TWEN (The West Education Network) page listing current activities and encouraging discussion and feedback among Society members.

Within the Center, alumni have been active in the selection and coaching of Washburn Law’s national trial competition team. Alumni Steve Maxwell ‘89, Kevin Shepherd ‘00, and Todd Powell ‘98 were judges during a competition to select the team. Team coaches, in addition to Professor Kaye, are Jason Coody ‘01 and Rebecca Farrell ‘01. Tom Beale ‘00 and Patrice Petersen-Klein ‘97 have also volunteered to coach.

Washburn Law also will compete at the Association of Trial Lawyers of America student trial competition next spring. L. J. Leatherman ‘92 of Palmer, Leatherman and White is helping form a student ATLA chapter at Washburn.

Future plans for the Center include a series of dinners for members of the student group with judges, faculty, and practitioners to discuss significant issues in advocacy of interest to the bar and to students. A planned judicial mentoring program and a network with practicing lawyers will introduce law students to lawyers who will allow them to sit in on depositions, negotiations, and court and administrative hearings.

In January, prominent criminal defense lawyer Dan Monnat and his wife Grace X. Wu-Monnat will present a program on Kung Fu strategies and the art of trial advocacy. This popular program uses principles of martial arts to focus on strategies in pre-trial preparation and at trial. Grace X. Wu-Monnat has a bachelor’s degree in martial arts from Shanghai Teacher’s University in China and a master’s degree in sports administration from Wichita State University. She serves as a consultant to Monnat during jury selection and at trial.

“We have many more projects under way and being planned for the Advocacy Center,” Professor Kaye said. “We believe that the Center will be a magnet for energy, creativity, and collaboration between practitioners, students, faculty, and judges, all working to help students develop the art of the advocate.”

If you wish to learn more about the Center, or if you would like to volunteer to mentor students, please contact Director, Professor Michael Kaye, at michael.kaye@washburn.edu.