Program Overview

The Trial Advocacy emphasis at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University offers students the opportunity to focus their coursework on mastering the advocacy skills needed to effectively represent clients in court and other dispute-resolution processes.

The program fuses traditional law and practice-oriented courses that draw upon the experience of distinguished trial lawyers and judges who serve as adjunct faculty. This select group of legal professionals serve as mentors for students seeking to hone their advocacy skills with substantive lecturers for courses dealing with a wide variety of practice areas.

Why Trial Advocacy?

Trial Advocacy at ASU Law provides students interested in careers in criminal prosecution, criminal defense, or civil litigation with a prescribed course of study to help prepare them for practice. Employers look for credentials showing that graduates have a demonstrated interest in trial advocacy and a solid foundation in the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the field. Students in the program will earn these credentials by focusing their upper-division study on classes and experiential learning that will help them become more effective advocates.

Faculty Expertise

Professor Bob Dauber, the Charles M. Brewer Professor of Trial Advocacy, serves as the director of the Trial Advocacy Program. He teaches courses relating to civil procedure, trial advocacy, and dispute-resolution processes and has been actively involved in ASU Law's Clinical Program. In addition to Professor Dauber, approximately 50 distinguished trial lawyers and judges participate in the program as adjunct faculty and mentors. These experts in trial advocacy provide guidance to students as they transition from law student to practicing lawyer.

The Litigation Experience

One of the core courses in the Trial Advocacy Program is The Litigation Experience, a unique, four-credit course, which covers a hypothetical civil case from the initial meeting with the client through the trial of the lawsuit. The course is centered on simulation exercises that address all aspects of litigation, including interviewing, motion practice, discovery, alternative dispute resolution, and trial advocacy. Students are divided into groups of eight, with four assigned as plaintiff's counsel and four as defendant's counsel. Two experienced trial lawyers from the community serve as mentors for the students in each section.

Each week includes a 1.5-hour lecture on a specific issue (e.g., Rule 12 motions, expert depositions, opening statements) and a related 2.5-hour participatory skills session. Near the end of the semester, each skills section conducts its own mock trial.

Program Benefits

The program has a focused group of core courses, litigation-oriented electives, and skills training classes. Included in the trial advocacy curriculum are a number of highly specialized one-credit, six-week courses, such as Persuasive Speech, International Arbitration, and Litigation & Courtroom Technology. These one-credit courses are scheduled to allow students to take them back to back during a single semester.

Other opportunities include the Holloway Trial Advocacy Award named for the late Paul W. Holloway, a noted trial attorney. The award is given to a student in the Trial Advocacy Program who has completed the requirements for the Advocacy Fellow designation and whose academic achievement and advocacy skills are most reflective of the fulfillment of the program's goals.
Sample Course Offerings

- ADR and Employment Law
- Advanced Criminal Procedure
- Advanced Legal Writing – Litigation Practice
- Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Appellate Advocacy
- Arbitration
- Attorneys’ Fees, Costs, Sanctions
- Civil Pretrial Practice
- Claims Against Government Entities
- Class Actions
- Comparative Dispute Resolution
- Conflicts of Law
- Construction Law
- Creditor Remedies
- Electronic Discovery & Digital Evidence
- Evidence
- Federal Advocacy for the Tribal Client
- Federal Courts
- Federal Criminal Practice & Procedure
- Health Care Fraud Investigations – Litigation
- International Arbitration
- Insurance Bad Faith Litigation
- Judicial Remedies
- Jury Selection
- Litigation & Courtroom Technology
- Litigation Experience
- Lodestar Mediation Clinic
- Malpractice Litigation
- Mass Tort Litigation
- Mediation and Settlement Advocacy
- Negotiation
- Patent Litigation
- Persuasive Speech
- Products Liability
- Prosecutorial Ethics & Decision Making
- Prosecuting Trademark Applications
- Real Estate Foreclosure
- Real Estate Litigation
- Topics in Bankruptcy Law
- Trial Advocacy
- Victims in Criminal Procedure
- Writing for Law Practice

Testimonials

“The Trial Advocacy Program equipped me with practical skills that have been invaluable to my practice as a litigation associate. I received hands-on training on how to take depositions, argue motions, examine witnesses, and work a mini-trial from start to finish. These experiences gave me an advantage as a first-year attorney, and I was much more comfortable and prepared when it came time to actually practice law. Participating in the program is one of the best ways I can think of to help law students prepare to be litigation attorneys.”

- Nicole M. Stewart, JD ’15

“The Trial Advocacy Program was one of the best law school experiences I had. I learned practical practice pointers and essential skills from attorneys actually working in the field. These are generally things that you only get to talk about in a classroom, but never actually do. Without the program, I would have never learned them until I started my career. Simply put, the program gives you a head start at being a lawyer.”

- Timothy H. Sparling, JD ’16

“From the outset of my career as a U.S. Air Force JAG Officer, advocacy and litigation have been at the heart of my job. I was expected to know the rules of evidence, to be capable of arguing the finer points of the law, and to be poised to prosecute a case from motions through sentencing. Nothing could have better prepared me for the challenges I would face than the Trial Advocacy Program. With courses ranging from Fact Investigation to Persuasive Speech to Technology in the Courtroom, the program imbued me with the practical skill set that I would need. The course that really stood out and set the program apart was The Litigation Experience. My classmates and I tried a case from start to finish, under the instruction and mentorship of some of the top litigators in the Arizona State Bar. It was truly a unique and enriching educational experience, and I owe much of my professional success to the foundations that were built in the Trial Advocacy Program.”

- Sean McGarvey, JD ’13