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Professionalism Committee Celebrates 25th Year of Law School Professionalism Orientations

The Professionalism Committee reflects upon the last 25 years' experiences while also looking toward the future.

BY NICOLE G. IANNARONE AND ROBERT ARRINGTON



At the first Orientation on Professionalism, then-assistant director of the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism Sally Lockwood told law students and volunteer lawyer attendees that both the State Bar's Professionalism Committee and Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism "hope that these Orientations on Professionalism will become a tradition at the law schools." After the Professionalism Committee completed the 25th annual Professionalism Orientations at each of the six Georgia law schools in August, we can say that the Professionalism Orientations have transcended tradition to become part of the foundational professional development education of thousands of lawyers.

The dual aims Lockwood described at the inaugural program remain: "to demonstrate the unity among the law schools, the organized bar, practitioners and the judiciary in the move to raise the

First-year law students at the University of Georgia School of Law participate in a breakout group.

PHOTO BY TERIE LATALA



Georgia State University College of Law students take the oath of professionalism given by Justice David Nahmias.

professional aspirations of lawyers in this state.” Each year, several dozen judges and lawyers from every practice area donate their time to underscore the importance of professionalism. From the group leaders’ perspective, professionalism is something they have learned through experience, both their own when faced with hard choices and by observing lawyer colleagues. In both cases, they learn from positive and negative examples and use them to craft their identity as a professional attorney. While law students know they want to be a professional attorney, they have not yet had any experience in the law, and they look for role models to help them identify what steps they should take to develop a professional identity as a lawyer. Professionalism Orientations help jump start students’ professional identity formation and equip them with a framework for approaching professionalism issues. The program also introduces them to lawyers who further offer their time to meet and talk after the formal program concludes.

Students are not the sole learners in the Professionalism Orientation program. When we hear from discussion group leaders, they tell us that the value of the program is not what they give, but what

they get: the ability to welcome the newest entrants into our great profession and learn from them. Orientation group leader Jessica Jay Wood says of her experience this year: “I got some spectacularly kind, insightful, and wise messages today from law students and younger attorneys who think I’m mentoring them. Plot twist: *They are reverse-stealth-mentoring me.*”

As we reflect upon the last 25 years’ experiences, we are also looking toward the future. The Professionalism Committee is conducting a top-to-bottom review of the entire Professionalism Orientation Program. Our goal is to foster a deeper partnership with the faculties, administrators and students at each of the Georgia law schools. We want to ensure our model program is current, comprehensive and compelling. We will work with our law school administration and student partners to identify and address the issues they find most relevant.

Last year, the Professionalism Committee’s dedicated volunteers expanded the outreach program, in which we asked second- and third-year students for their feedback and suggestions on how to improve the orientations. It was highly successful, and the resulting changes were well-received by the schools. We look



Hon. Eric Richardson addresses students at Atlanta’s John Marshall Law School.

forward to expanding that program this year, with the possibility of having senior students actively participate in the orientations to relay their personal experiences dealing with many of the issues discussed in the breakout sessions. Because professional identity formation is so crucial to students’ development, we are looking to expand the orientation to include a Winter/Spring program for second- and third-year students.

The solid foundation of the past will guide us in our efforts to further grow and expand the Professionalism Orientation Program. We hope you will join us and share your input, ideas and experiences as we look toward the next 25 years. ●

Nicole G. Iannarone

Chair, State Bar Professionalism Committee,
Assistant Clinical Professor, Investor
Advocacy Clinic
Georgia State University College of Law

niannarone@gsu.edu

Robert Arrington

Vice Chair, State Bar Professionalism
Committee, Managing Partner
Arrington Owoo PC

robert@aomlaw.com