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## LAW SCHOOL NOTES

### Writing clearly earns acclaim

John Marshall's Susan Brody brings school's program to national attention

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She was hired as a short-term contract teacher in 1982 to teach legal writing at The John Marshall Law School.

Susan L. Brody soon redesigned the writing program at the request of then-Dean Leonard Jay Schragger and in 1984 became the first director of the school's Lawyering Skills Program, which is still primarily legal writing and research.

Today, John Marshall's legal writing program is regularly ranked in the top 10 in the nation by U.S. News & World Report. Most recently it ranks sixth.

Brody became a founding member of the Legal Writing Institute in the 1980s, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving legal writing. Today, the institute has more than 2,100 members who include legal writing professors, lawyers and judges.

And she was one of the founders of the Association of Legal Writing Directors.

Last month, she was honored by the Association of American Law Schools with an award for "significant lifetime contribution to the field of legal writing, reasoning and research."

"This is sooo not about me," Brody said today. "It's about the institution. John Marshall gave me a chance to do something that I think has turned out to be very important for legal education and for the school.

"Without John Marshall's institutional support, what I've done would have never been possible."

"It's about the support the faculty and the administration have always given to the Lawyering Skills Program to give us the

resources to put it on the national map ..."

When Brody started as an instructor in 1982, legal writing instructors were not tenure track at John Marshall. They still aren't at most schools.

But Schragger "had a vision of creating a four-semester sequence of courses" to teach almost all legal documents, also research, and related skills, Brody said. He asked Brody to design the program, hire the people and he appointed her as director.

With input from the faculty, she said she created a 10-credit hour, required program, much different and longer than most other schools at the time.

Her four courses were "introduction to objective writing," next, "persuasive writing," then "appellate advocacy," and finally,

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The Association of American Law Schools recently honored Susan L. Brody (center) for her work in developing the legal writing program at The John Marshall Law School. She posed here with Anthony S. Niedwiecki, director of the Lawyering Skills Program, and professor Maureen Straub Kordesh, who has also worked with the program.

"drafting" of documents, such as contracts.

With many changes and innovations over the years, those four course areas have remained the foundation at John Marshall today.

Brody said she vastly reduced class sizes. Each section soon had only 15 to 20 students so that professors could give each student individual attention. She hired 20 adjunct professors, each of whom taught one section.

Several full-time teachers were allowed to teach three sections at different class times.

A real innovation, Brody said, was "we were one of the first where the full-time people ... were tenure track faculty, one of the first in the country to do this."

Brody said she also hired a staff member at John Marshall in the late 1980s as a writing specialist to help students individually.

This staff member evolved into what is today the school's Writing Resource Center with one full-time and three part-time staff attorneys. Those four give students individual conferences to help with their writing, said the current director of the Lawyering Skills Program, professor Anthony S. Niedwiecki.

Last year, John Marshall students "had over 1,200 appoint-

ments that were 30 minutes each" at the Writing Resource Center, Niedwiecki said.

The Lawyering Skills Program, which constantly evolves, did a survey last spring of alumni and employers of alumni on what first-year attorneys needed to know. They got 700 responses, Niedwiecki said.

As a result, the school is now designing online programs to teach how to do electronic case filings and "how to do research on free databases" such as Google Scholar, Fastcase and Casemaker in addition to the current instruction on the major pay databases.

The school's new online programs will also teach drafting of additional documents. The new ones will include "discovery requests, settlement agreements and civil complaints," Niedwiecki said.

As an example of John Marshall's standing in the legal writing field, Niedwiecki is the incoming president of the Association of Legal Writing Directors. And professor Maureen Straub Kordesh, who succeeded Brody as director of the Lawyering Skills Program in 1995, was president of the Association of Legal Writing Directors in 1998.

Brody, a former associate dean at the school, today teaches civil procedure and feminist legal theory.

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