

Susann “Sunny” MacLachlan

PREPARING OUR STUDENTS TO SUCCEED

An Experience-Based Approach

The John Marshall Law School is proud of its heritage of delivering diverse, courtroom-ready attorneys to the legal community. Nowhere is this more evident than in its Center for Advocacy and Dispute Resolution. Led by Professor Susann “Sunny” MacLachlan, the Center is among the school’s six clinic-based programs. The law school also offers students the opportunity for hands-on activity in its Fair Housing and Veterans Clinics.

“Adhering to our core theme of ‘learning from practice’, our students are pushed to sharpen their advocacy and courtroom skills in real-world settings that would otherwise come only from actual practice,” explains MacLachlan. It’s a well-proven recipe for success – with students becoming self-starting advocates through clinical programs, technology enabled JD and LLM courses, preparations for trial advocacy, client-counseling, negotiation and mediation competitions, and a host of specialized externship programs, many driven and directed by Centers such as MacLachlan’s.

Illinois First District Appellate Justice, and class of 1975 John Marshall alum, the Honorable James Fitzgerald Smith confirms MacLachlan’s sentiment, “John Marshall students come (to me) with a practitioner’s mind-set, hoping to understand the legal theories that shape the issues on appeal as they scour the record looking for arguments.” He then forwards particular praise for the experience-based approach, “I applaud Professor MacLachlan’s expert administration of the Externship Program and strongly encourage every student to participate in an externship if they are able. These opportunities help bridge the teaching of law to the actual practice, immersing students into the real-life settings they will have to handle as new attorneys”.

MacLachlan, a 1994 *cum laude* graduate of John Marshall, also embodies this perspective – mentoring students through her own personal experiences. A Dean’s Scholar and a member of the Order of John Marshall, this 1994 recipient of the John Marshall Law School Award for Public Service was also the student representative to the Chicago Inn of Court, a membership she still holds. As a 3L, she also competed in the National Products Liability Moot Court



Competition taking third place nationally and delivering a second place best brief as well. “Having served on teams such as the ABA Criminal Justice Trial Advocacy team and the Regional Negotiation team back as a student,” relays MacLachlan, “confirms for me now just how important experience-based training is for our students.”

After graduation, MacLachlan served as an Assistant Corporation Counsel for eight years in the Municipal Prosecutions Division of Chicago’s Law Department. Later promoted to senior trial supervisor for the Mayor’s License Commission, she became increasingly involved in client counseling activities, in trial training activities for junior attorneys and law clerks, and in the development of trial and negotiation strategies. Finding a passion for this level of mentorship, she returned regularly to her alma mater, participating in numerous student programs, and as a judge and evaluator for various competitions and team practices.

MacLachlan joined John Marshall in 2002 as the Associate Director of the Center she now leads – and re-energized the school’s student Externship Program, furthering her conviction to the school’s proven approach to experience-based training. The Center offers **JD Certificates in Trial Advocacy** (focusing on developing practical skills and experience in trial procedures and litigation) and in **Alternative Dispute Resolution** (focusing on practical mediation and negotiation techniques). In addition, the Center also offers an **LLM Degree in Trial Advocacy and Dispute Resolution** through courses replete with hands-on exercises and simulations.

“We at John Marshall pride ourselves in delivering a unique combination of coursework, trial competitions and outside work-options designed to give students, as well as practicing attorneys, a competitive advantage over their peers,” says MacLachlan. “Our newly created LLM in Trial Advocacy and Dispute Resolution,” she continues, “is just one example of how this innovative instruction approach is geared to engage current JD candidates – in this case with an interest in litigation – while also providing



substantive benefits to practicing attorneys seeking to enhance their legal careers.”

Ranked 13th in the country in 2011’s **U.S. News & World Report**, John Marshall’s Trial Advocacy Program and MacLachlan’s Center for Advocacy and Dispute Resolution both capitalize on resources culled from highly distinguished groups of faculty and adjunct faculty members – all leaders in the legal community bringing forward-looking techniques and state-of-the-art technologies to the classroom. State and federal judges and prosecutors, certified mediators, and civil law attorneys in dozens of practice areas collectively contribute hundreds of years of experience to the school’s programs and coursework.

MacLachlan has played a significant role in John Marshall’s curriculum as well – teaching International Negotiation and Mediation, Trial Advocacy, and most recently Animal Law. In 2005, she petitioned the school to formalize her coursework in Animal Law – serving as the faculty advisor to the Animal Law Society and as a Board member for the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF). “The Animal Law course was considered experimental for the first three years, but in 2008, after our first- and second-place finishes at the Harvard Law School’s National Animal Advocacy Closing Argument Competition, I presented the course to the faculty as a permanent offering and it was approved unanimously.”

MacLachlan is pleased to see the Animal Law

discipline continue to grow. “I’m hoping for it to change our collective consciousness – to move people more toward compassion and care when dealing with the environment and the animals that populate it.” MacLachlan sums up her work done on behalf of animals by noting the ALDF poster adorning her office wall. Captioned below several images of various domestic and farm animals is the tagline ‘We may be the only lawyers on earth whose clients are all innocent.’ “That poster always seems to elicit the most positive and thoughtful responses from my students,” she said.

“Sunny’s support and dedication to the John Marshall law students is inspiring,” says Pamela Hart, Director of the ALDF’s Animal Law Program. “Winning the competitions at Harvard is a true testament to her expertise and commitment to her students and to Animal Law.” Under her leadership, MacLachlan’s Animal Law competition teams have earned five first place honors since 2008. In addition, during this time, the Center for Advocacy and Dispute Resolution has fielded several award-winning teams in a number of prestigious national competitions including: the Buffalo-Niagara National Mock Trial Competition, the ABA’s Law Student Division Negotiation Competition and its Labor and Employment Law Competition, the International Law School Mediation Tournament, the Texas Young Lawyers Association Regional Trial Advocacy Competition, and the American Association of Justice Student Trial Advocacy Competition.

In 2010, MacLachlan furthered the story of her commitment to an experience-based approach, by participating and presenting in an Open Society Foundation’s Faculty Development Program entitled “Building Relationships with the Community through Clinical Education.” MacLachlan points out, “Innovative programs like this help me reinforce how experience-based skills serve students and the community alike. And for many of my students, that will be a ‘habit of service’ that lasts a lifetime.”

For the faculty, staff and Board of Trustee members of The John Marshall Law School, providing courtroom-ready graduates means providing attorneys who are well-practiced, highly-skilled and passionate. It also means providing attorneys that capture the attention of employers around the globe. For MacLachlan, a downstate Illinois native who originally thought she would become a journalist, enabling this process has become an equally rewarding ‘habit of service’. “I have one of the most rewarding jobs possible” she enthuses.


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