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UWF legal studies students visit Florida Supreme Court

Pensacola, Fla. – May 26, 2016 – This spring, University of West Florida legal studies students had their day in court.

The trip was a long time coming, according to Dr. Kimberly McCorkle, chair of the UWF Department of Legal Studies, Public Administration and Sport Management. Plans came together when oral arguments at the Florida Supreme Court coincided with UWF's spring break. Moving forward, the trip will become an annual experience available to UWF legal studies students.

Participating students were able to make the trip at no cost as a result of donations from the legal studies advisory board. Expenses included travel, meals and an overnight hotel stay, followed by a full day in court.

The trip was open to UWF legal studies majors and minors. Priority was given to students enrolled in Legal Advocacy, the capstone course for majors taken by graduating seniors. Thirty-four students attended, led by three faculty members including McCorkle, associate professor Dr. Susan Harrell and assistant professor Dr. Charlie Penrod. UWF adjunct professor Valencia Davis, who works as the chief law clerk for Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, helped to facilitate the trip.

"The Florida Supreme Court is open to the public, but I don't know of other undergraduate programs that have had a full-day experience like this," said McCorkle, who is also an administrative fellow in the UWF Division of Academic Affairs. "It was so well-received by our students and such an exceptional learning experience."

Students spent the entire day in Tallahassee, beginning with an orientation about how the Florida Supreme Court works, the types of cases it hears and over which it has jurisdiction. The chief justice recognized UWF and welcomed the students at the beginning of the court session.

Before lunch, they observed four oral arguments, including one for a death penalty case.

“To say we got to watch a case that had an impact on life or death is not overstating it,” McCorkle said. “We also had the opportunity to observe three lawyer discipline cases, which was a valuable lesson in professionalism, as most of our students aspire to go to law school and become lawyers.”

After lunch, the students had the opportunity to meet three of the justices, who took off their black robes and spoke candidly about how they got there and what it was like. McCorkle likens it to going backstage with rock stars after a concert. Chief Justice Labarga, along with Justices Peggy Quince and James Perry, stayed with UWF students for an hour answering questions.

Next, students conducted a hypothetical Fourth Amendment search and seizure case, with some actually sitting in the justice’s chair and others at the counselors’ tables.

“Here at UWF, there is a renewed focus university-wide on experiential learning, which is so important because they can see that what they are learning matters, and how it matters,” McCorkle said. “It introduces them to what they will be doing in their profession and enriches them so much.”

Legal studies major Haleigh Pascoe says the trip gave her a new perspective on the legal system and opened her eyes to new areas of law she may want to practice.

“It's my personal belief that experience is the best teacher. Sitting in a classroom and absorbing the information presented to you by your professors is helpful to an extent, but experiences are the things you remember for the rest of your life,” Pascoe said. “These kinds of opportunities allow students to solidify and apply the concepts they've learned in class, which serves to further understanding.”

To learn more about the UWF legal studies program, visit uwf.edu/legalstudies.

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See attached photo of UWF legal studies students outside of the Florida Supreme Court



About the [University of West Florida](#): Founded in 1963, the University of West Florida is a vibrant, distinctive institution of higher learning with undergraduate, graduate and targeted research programs. With multiple locations in Northwest Florida, the University serves a student population of more than 12,000. Dedicated to helping students realize their full potential, UWF favors small class sizes with quality teacher-scholars who deliver personalized, innovative, hands-on learning and leadership opportunities.