

## Lawyering Skills

A strong legal writing program drives student success in law school, on the bar exam, and, most critically, in practice. The UMKC School of Law's Lawyering Skills program focuses on making students practice-ready from day one.

### The First-Year Program

The first-year JD program curriculum includes a two-semester, five-credit-hour legal research and writing course requirement during which students simulate practice at every opportunity. In the first semester, students research and write multiple legal memoranda—each progressively more complex than the previous—assessing the merits of their clients' cases under prevailing law. In the second semester, students prepare trial briefs advocating their clients' positions, after which they present oral arguments before a panel of judges comprised of local practitioners and faculty.

At the end of the first-year course, each student will be able to do the following: read, comprehend, and synthesize applicable laws; logically organize legal analyses on behalf of their clients according to those laws, identifying both strengths and weaknesses of their clients' claims; and write succinctly and clearly with appropriate tone and style, conforming their work product to applicable professional standards.

The first-year course equips students with the foundational skills necessary to begin work as a judicial intern or law firm clerk, represent clients through one of the law school's many clinics, or serve as a research or teaching assistant for a faculty member, among other practical, career-focused opportunities offered by, or promoted in collaboration with, the law school.

### Advanced Legal Writing Courses

In their second and third years, students can then refine their techniques through advanced legal writing courses focusing on areas of specific interest and, likely, areas of intended future practice. Courses include those concentrating on practical skills development, contract drafting, litigation practice, appellate practice, legislative interpretation, and scholarly writing, among other areas.

### Lawyering Skills Faculty

The UMKC School of Law provides students with a full-time legal writing faculty with over fifty years of combined teaching experience in addition to their significant practice experience with Am Law 100 law firms, in federal judicial clerkships, in state government, and as in-house counsel. The Lawyering Skills faculty further serves in leadership roles on boards and committees of leading legal writing organizations,



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*Language is the central tool of [a lawyer's] trade. [W]hen we're looking at a statute, . . . we're relying on the language. When we're construing the Constitution, we're looking at words. [Words] are the building blocks of the law. [I]f we're not fastidious . . . with language, it dilutes the effectiveness and clarity of the law. . . . [T]he more careful [we] are with [our] language, . . . the better job [we're] going to do in capturing in those words exactly what [we] want the law to do . . . .*

– United States Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr.

*Legal Research and Writing is a foundational skill for all attorneys. Attorneys communicate in writing to their clients, public, courts, companies—it's all writing, all the time and the formats vary significantly across the audiences. UMKC is proud of its record of educating our students to be excellent professional writers in all these settings.*

– Dean Barbara Glesner Fines

including both the Association of Legal Writing Directors (ALWD) and the Legal Writing Institute (LWI). They regularly speak and present regionally and nationally; they publish well-regarded, practical texts on research and writing.

### Small Class Size

UMKC's Lawyering Skills program benefits from—and succeeds as a result of—its small class size, which allows its faculty the opportunity to provide individualized instruction and feedback to its students. For example, in first-year legal writing courses, faculty-led classes average twenty-four or fewer students; supplemental workshops led by supervised and trained teaching assistants average twelve or fewer students. UMKC likewise caps enrollment in its advanced legal writing courses to a seminar-size group of students. As a result, the faculty can provide tailored feedback in response to each student's written work product and meet individually with students multiple times over the course of a semester to discuss their progress.

The UMKC School of Law prides itself on the success of its Lawyering Skills program, which annually produces future legal innovators and leaders in all fields of practice, both locally and nationally.

***[INSERT: Student, faculty, alumnus/a video testimonials]***

### FACULTY

- Rodney Miller
- Judy Popper
- Wanda Temm

### JOSEPH E. STEVENS JR. MEMORIAL PRIZE

Annually, the Lawyering Skills program awards one first-year student with The Joseph E. Stevens Jr. Memorial Prize. This annual prize honors the Honorable Joseph E. Stevens Jr., a former Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Judge Stevens was well-known for his own legal writing and for supporting legal writing education in law schools, including teaching a course at the UMKC School of Law.

The Stevens Prize is awarded to the first-year law student who has shown outstanding legal writing and shows great promise of further contribution to legal writing while in law school and in his or her career. The Stevens Prize includes a small monetary award and recognition at graduation.

Previous winners include:

- 2018-2019: Brigid Burroughs
- 2017-2018: Scott Schwend
- 2016-2017: Jonathan Brown

## **Lawyering Skills in One Sentence:**

The UMKC School of Law provides its students with a nationally ranked legal writing program designed to prepare students for success in law school, on the bar exam, and throughout their professional careers.

## **Lawyering Skills in 100 Words:**

The UMKC School of Law's Lawyering Skills program—which U.S. News & World Report ranks as one of the twenty best in the country—focuses on making students practice-ready from day one. The law school's first-year curriculum includes a two-semester, five-credit-hour legal research and writing course requirement, during which students draft legal memoranda and court filings focusing on comprehension, organization, analysis, advocacy, and professionalism. Students can then expand on these concepts in upper-level legal writing courses focused on specific areas of interest, including litigation practice and transactional drafting. UMKC's Lawyering Skills courses are taught by full-time faculty (with over fifty years of combined teaching experience) in small classroom settings to ensure faculty can provide individually tailored feedback to each student.