



## DEAN'S NOTE

Dear SIU Simmons Law Community,

As I write this farewell, I am filled with a mix of emotions. Over the last four years, I have enjoyed getting to know you. I am excited about all that we have accomplished and immensely grateful for the incredible experiences and unwavering support. The friendships have been invaluable. I am honored to be a part of the SIU narrative and I am confident that the law school will continue to thrive.



*Dean Davidson*

While I am excited by my new opportunity as president and dean of Mitchell Hamline, I will always cherish the memories at SIU. The Southern Illinois community has left an indelible mark on me. Thank you for being a part of my journey. I look forward to staying in touch and seeing all the amazing things SIU Simmons Law School will continue to achieve.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Camille M. Davidson  
Dean and Professor of Law

## New Dean Search Updates

Associate Dean Angela Upchurch will serve as Acting Dean and Professor Sheila Simon will serve as Acting Associate Dean. A search committee has been formed and Parker Executive Search is leading the search. If you know of individuals who may be interested in a deanship, please send their name to Dean Upchurch or [share this link](#).

## Acting Dean Angela Upchurch

Professor Angela Upchurch joined the law faculty at Southern Illinois University School of Law in 2014. She is a recognized expert in law school pedagogy, children and family law, and procedural law.

Professor Upchurch has presented on legal pedagogy, and her innovative approaches to integrating technology into the law school classroom, at several national teaching conferences and faculty workshops at law schools across the country. Professor Upchurch drew upon her innovative use of educational technology to co-author *Click & Learn: Civil Procedure*, an online interactive book for law students published by Carolina Academic Press. In 2020, Professor Upchurch was awarded the Southern Illinois University-Level Tenured/Tenure-Track Teaching Excellence Award and received the permanent title of Distinguished Teacher. In 2022, she joined the Editorial Board for the *Journal of Law Teaching and Learning*.



Professor Upchurch received her J.D. from Loyola University Chicago School of Law where she graduated first in her class and served as the editor-in-chief for the Loyola University Chicago Law Journal and as a Loyola Child Law Fellow. After graduation from law school, Professor Upchurch was a law clerk to the Honorable Michael M. Murphy of the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and to the Honorable Avern Cohn of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. She was a member of the law faculty of Capital University School of Law from 2003 until she joined the law faculty at Southern Illinois University School of Law.



## Acting Associate Dean Sheila Simon

Professor Sheila Simon rejoined the School of Law faculty after serving as Lieutenant Governor of Illinois from 2011 to 2015. Since returning to the school she has taught Property, Torts, Legal Writing, Advanced Real Estate Transactions, Children and the Law, Government Ethics, and a seminar on Crime Victims and Witnesses. As Lieutenant Governor she worked on many issues including education policy and secure funding for rape crisis centers.

In addition to her experience in state government and local government, Simon has been a long-time teacher at the School of Law, and was the first staff attorney for the Domestic Violence Clinic. Before joining the faculty, she was an assistant state's attorney for four years, with two of those years spent prosecuting domestic batterers. Her civil law experience includes five years as a staff attorney at Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance and three years in private practice. Simon is one of the authors of *Legal Writing*, now in its third edition.

Simon graduated from the Georgetown University Law Center in 1987, and from Wittenberg University in 1983. Ms. Simon is a member of the board of the Women's Center, Equality Illinois, and Marcy's Law Illinois. She has served on a panel to screen federal judge applicants and been a pro bono attorney for the Association for Late Deafened Adults. She also served on the Carbondale City Council from 2003 to 2007.



## CLASS OF 2024 COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

By Pete Rosenberg

Thomas C. Britton, who has a five-decade relationship with as a member of its first graduating class, will delivered the keynote address during commencement ceremonies on Friday, May 10.

The ceremony in Shryock Auditorium honored 77 graduates in the Class of 2024.

Chancellor Austin A. Lane conferred degrees at the ceremony with SIU System President Dan Mahony and J. Phil Gilbert, U.S. senior district judge and SIU Board of Trustees chair, also in attendance.

“We are excited to celebrate the commencement of the Class of 2024,” Dean Camille Davidson said. “This marks an end to their time at SIU School of Law and a new beginning in their legal field of choice. This occasion also concludes our 50th anniversary celebration and begins our transition to the SIU Simmons Law School, continuing our legacy of excellence and commitment to shaping tomorrow’s leaders.”

The Class of 2024 selected Michael Keeney, who is from Oak Lawn, Illinois, to be the class speaker. Keeney has a bachelor’s degree in English education from Illinois State University. During law school, he was part of the moot court team that was a finalist at the 2024 American Bar Association National Health Law competition in Las Vegas. He ranked No. 2 oral advocate, and the team won best brief of the tournament. After graduation and taking the bar exam, Keeney plans to return to Chicago and hopes to serve as a prosecutor in the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.

Peter Alexander, a professor of law and former law school dean, was the faculty speaker.

The ceremony marks the 48th anniversary of the law school’s first graduating class of 1976, three years after the law school was founded.

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Picture L-R: Alicia Bridges, Coach Michael Lennix, Nicholas Limenato, and Katherine Bauer.

## SIU MOOT COURT TEAM CAPTURES NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE/ADOPTION LAW

Last year, after the then-3L team won the Child Welfare and Adoption Law Competition, the then-2L team said they were going to come back the next year and win it again. Well, they did it! Under the guidance of Moot Court alumnus Michael Lennix, SIU Law is the two-time champion of CWAL! Our current 2L team also did very well, advancing to the quarterfinal rounds. Here are Coach Michael's comments about both teams:

"Our 2L team of Kaitlyn Coffey, Timothy Hogan, and Jack Lakenburgers showed true promise. The 2L team advanced to the second round of elimination and, though their performances were very strong, the other team's performance was near flawless. I have the utmost confidence that they will be in the final round next year, but I am truly proud of their performance.

"The 3L team, comprised of Katherine Bauer, Alicia Bridges, and Nicholas Limentato... won... the whole competition. On their way to the top they avenged the 2Ls, beating the team that edged them out. The performances were outstanding, at times making my own eyes well with tears of pride. They beat teams with brief awards and oralist awards. Additionally, Alicia Bridges won best oralist for the final round with her own amazing performance."

Congratulations all around to our great SIU Law students (and a very proud coach)!

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**Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion**





## LAW STUDENTS' TRIP TO KENYA HELPS PREPARE THEM FOR A GLOBALIZED WORKPLACE

By Pete Rosenberg

For Southern Illinois University Carbondale law students Kameron Clay and Paige Berger, 8 days in Kenya as part of Simmons Law School's legal globalization and comparative law course is a time they will not forget.

"My experience in Kenya opened my eyes to the world and how much more it has in store than just what is in the U.S.," said Clay, a third-year student from St. Louis. "The trip made me realize how privileged I am to be a law student in America. Since coming back, I have been reluctant to take even the simple things for granted."

For Berger, a second-year student from Willowbrook, Illinois, this was "a big opportunity" to participate in a mock trial. It also gave her a chance to learn to work with people whom she had not met before "and instantly start collaborating and connecting with each other."

Clay and Berger were among 14 SIU students from Simmons Law School to spend spring break in March studying the Kenyan legal system. Course co-instructors Professor Chris Behan and Dean Camille Davidson and the SIU students participated with 18 University of Nairobi School of Law students, who came from three campuses.

"The goal was to form hybrid teams of American and Kenyan law students who would learn how to form cross-cultural teams and work effectively together across distances and cultures," Behan said. "We felt this would be excellent preparation for our students to function at a high level in an increasingly globalized workplace environment."

SIU students received lessons on basic trial techniques from both Kenyan and American instructors, and as teams, met via online videoconferencing programs to prepare and try a case based on Kenyan law in a Kenyan magistrate court in a live mock trial competition at the Nairobi law school's Mombasa campus.

### Evenly divided teams

The students formed eight teams, with most of them having two Americans and two Kenyans, Behan said. Each team was coached by a Kenyan lawyer from the Mombasa Law Society; the lawyers volunteered their time and expertise.

"We did not want the competition to be the United States versus Kenya, or Southern

Illinois University versus the University of Nairobi,” Behan said. “Rather, we wanted each hybrid team to form its own identity, figure out how to work together from a distance and with different time zones, and compete against other similarly situated teams.”

Clay said his most gratifying part of the trip was “the immediate connection that I had to my team after meeting them for the first time in person.”

“My Kenyan teammate, Arike Omwango, and I were truly dynamic in our mock trial competition as if we’d tried cases together before,” he said. “It was rewarding to have such a strong performance alongside her given that we had only met and practiced a handful of times.”

Berger added that all of the students easily connected to one another.

“Everyone we met and worked with was so nice, and it felt like we instantly became friends,” she said.

She earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. After moving to St. Louis and working for an area law firm, she applied to law schools and toured SIU.

“I loved how small the class sizes were and the sense of community throughout the school and the town,” said Berger, who will graduate in May 2025. She plans to pursue bankruptcy law.

Clay earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology with a minor in multicultural studies, so the experience in Kenya “took my knowledge in that regard to new levels,” he said.

He will graduate from law school on May 10 and said he selected SIU “to become a zealous advocate for the oppressed and downtrodden.” Clay said his plan is to start working as a public defender or as an attorney for a legal aid office. After gaining sufficient courtroom experience, he wants to become a plaintiff’s personal injury attorney.

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### **Legal globalization course experiences**

This was the latest legal globalization and comparative law course offered at the law school — others taught by faculty focused on Germany, Australia, Cuba, South Africa and Botswana, Behan said. The idea for this trip began in 2016 when Behan traveled to Mombasa to teach a trial advocacy course. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he taught a comparative law writing seminar and invited several guest speakers to speak to students via Zoom. Behan said the experience showed a distance-learning collaborative course

for both American and Kenyan students could be accomplished.

The experience exceeded Behan's expectations, he said.

"The students figured out how to work together as teams," he said. "By the time they met each other in person, they had already been working with each other for more than a month, and it was as if they were reuniting with old friends. The competitive environment spurred them to prepare and perform at a high level. Every team wanted to win, and every trial round was highly competitive."

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## SIU SIMMONS LAW SCHOOL DIVERSITY PRELAW SUMMER INSTITUTE

By Carly Hotlkamp



The 3rd Annual Diversity Prelaw Summer Institute took place in May with eleven students participating. The Institute operates for and benefits diverse college and university current sophomores and juniors (rising juniors and seniors) who desire information and strategies to prepare for law school. Participants learned about the application and admissions process, the Law School Admissions Test, how to properly read and review a case, legal writing, paying for law school, and various career paths. Institute attendees will interact with and have presentations and discussions facilitated by lawyers, law students, and law school faculty. Students arrived on Sunday afternoon and enjoyed dinner and a game night to get to know each other.

On Monday, They had a full day in the Lesar Law Building, learning from panels of faculty, staff,

and current students. That evening, they got to experience the hidden gem that is the SIU Craft Shop.

On Tuesday, the college students from around the country toured the Jackson County Courthouse and witnessed in-court proceedings. The Jackson County State's Attorney, Joe Cervantes, and members of his team also joined the group for dinner and an activity at SIU Touch of Nature.

On Wednesday the group headed to Memphis to see the National Civil Rights Museum and meet with the Ben F. Jones Chapter of the National Bar Association.

On Thursday, they headed north to St. Louis to tour Thompson Coburn LLP, where they participated in a Q&A discussion with diverse attorneys and saw some St. Louis sites.

Today, before the program wrapped up, students were surprised with a letter letting them know that if they are admitted to SIU Simmons Law School in the next two years, they would be eligible to receive a scholarship! Fun fact: one of the former participants of this program was one of the student facilitators during the week!

Thank you to Deidre Powell '21 for her hard work coordinating this program for the last 3 years.

As always, thanks to SIU LAW Alum Kyle Stokien '04 and his employer, Goldman Sachs, for their support of this program!

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## Branding and Partnerships



## HISTORIC SIMMONS DONATION WILL EXPAND AND ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY

A \$10 million gift from John and Jayne Simmons will impact generations of Southern Illinois University Carbondale law students and strengthen the law school's ability to serve its students and the region. In honor of their generosity, the law school will be named Simmons Law School, pending approval from the SIU Board of Trustees in April.

The transformational donation comes as the law school is celebrating its 50th anniversary. It will enhance and expand the educational offerings to students and opportunities for faculty.

"Fifty years ago, we were founded in the public interest to serve the public good," said Camille Davidson, dean of the SIU School of Law. "This generous gift empowers us to



advance our mission on a larger scale and with an even greater impact.”

This historic gift – the largest SIU Carbondale has ever received – was announced Monday, Feb. 5, further cementing John and Jayne Simmons’ legacy at SIU, which includes a \$10.2 million commitment to the Simmons Cancer Institute at the SIU School of Medicine in Springfield. Their most recent contribution comes as a major step in the ongoing \$500 million Imagine SIU 2030 fundraising campaign.

Simmons Law School is depicted in this digitally altered image. “We are so incredibly excited and inspired by this act of generosity,” Chancellor Austin Lane said. “John and Jayne Simmons are shining examples of the impact individuals can have on our institution and the entire region. Their unwavering support and diligent service speak volumes.”

John Simmons, a native and resident of Alton, is an SIU Edwardsville graduate, member of the SIU Board of Trustees, and chairperson and founder of Simmons Hanly Conroy law firm. His and Jayne’s support will help provide more access, services and opportunities to students seeking educational opportunities.

The law school is the alma mater of more than 180 local, state and federal judges. It has alumni practicing law in 48 states and more than 10 countries. It also features legal clinics that serve members of underrepresented communities and offer students real-world experience.

“The SIU university system has provided me with many opportunities to better my life,” John Simmons said. “A thriving law school will help support others in southern Illinois who are working hard day-to-day to improve their own lives. SIU holds a special place for me. We would really like people to look at Simmons Law School as an attainable place where they are welcome, they belong and they can thrive.”

#### A legacy of service, philanthropy

John Simmons has served two stints on the SIU Board of Trustees, the first from 2004 to 2015, and he was appointed again in 2019 by Gov. J.B. Pritzker. He has previously functioned as the board’s secretary and chairman. He earned his law degree from Southern Methodist University and previously served in the U.S. Army as a combat engineer.

In 1999, John founded Simmons Hanly Conroy, one of the nation’s largest plaintiff’s law firms. The firm has dedicated the past 25 years to representing workers and families impacted by mesothelioma, a fatal and preventable asbestos-related cancer. Under his leadership, the firm expanded to new practice areas and now employs more than 250 people, including more than 80 attorneys, in offices across the country. Most recently, the firm successfully helped lead the national effort to hold manufacturers and distributors of prescription opiates accountable for the opioid epidemic. Firm employees have donated more than \$1 million to local charities through the Simmons Employee Foundation and more than \$20 million to cancer research nationwide.

Simmons Hanly Conroy has long been involved with SIU’s law school, providing internships and employing its graduates.

“We have been working collaboratively with Simmons Hanly Conroy for years,” Davidson

said. "Its broad reach as a national law firm will help to elevate the law school's recognition and reputation."

The Simmons Cancer Institute at the SIU School of Medicine is a community-based patient care, research, education and outreach program created to improve cancer care for the citizens of central and southern Illinois. John Simmons also started an initiative to provide free dental care for veterans at the SIUE Dental School in Alton.

John and Jayne are civic leaders, community advocates, real estate developers and act as a catalyst for transformational change in southern Illinois. Beyond Simmons Hanly Conroy, John and Jayne founded AltonWorks, a social impact redevelopment company focused on the revitalization of historic downtown Alton as a healthy, thriving, walkable city. Community contributions are an important part of their story. They have invested significant resources, including time, money and advocacy to people, programs, issues, initiatives and causes designed to create opportunities to help people better their lives.

AltonWorks was founded on the principles of livability, environmental stewardship, social justice and inclusivity and believes in rebuilding communities for optimum social impact. AltonWorks offers thought leadership, planning, convening and connecting, adding capacity to the region's ability to attract funding, expand social impact, catalyze economic growth and anchor downstate recovery.



## SIU SIMMONS LAW SCHOOL HONORED FIVE ALUMNI AT 50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA

By Pete Rosenberg

Five distinguished graduates of the Southern Illinois University School of Law were honored in March at the school's 50th anniversary gala.

One alum, nominated by law school alumni and former law school faculty for each of the law school's five decades, were honored:

1973-1983 – John Brewster, 1976.

1984-1993 – Lyndon Sommer, 1993.

1994-2003 – Cecilia Najera, 1999.

2004-2013 – Tionn Fambro Carter, 2008.

2014-2023 – Cameron Washington Woods, 2017.

"Throughout the span of the last 50 years, our esteemed alumni have consistently risen to prominence, distinguishing themselves as exemplary figures in the areas of law, public service, and community leadership," Dean Camille Davidson said. "As we celebrated our 50th anniversary, we proudly honored five individuals nominated by their peers for their remarkable achievements and enduring legacy at the SIU Law Gala."

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## GENE AND KATY SIMONDS LECTURE IN DEMOCRACY

By Pete Rosenbery

Legal historian, bestselling author and entrepreneur Logan Beirne discussed presidential power through the nation's history during a lecture on April 9.

Beirne presented "A History of Presidential Power" in the law school's Hiram H. Lesar Building Formal Lounge.

Beirne is a faculty fellow and lecturer in law at Yale Law School and CEO of DealPulse, Inc. He co-founded and led Matterhorn Transactions, a legal tech company that serviced thousands of law firms across the United States, United Kingdom and Canada, which he sold to an acquirer in 2023.

Beirne published the bestselling book "Blood of Tyrants: George Washington & the Forging of the Presidency," which examines "how the battlefield decisions of the founders continue to shape the meaning of the U.S. Constitution." The book received the Colby Award and the Lincoln Medal. Beirne and his writings have been featured by The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Times, Reuters, National Review and other media outlets.

In the lecture, Beirne focused on how George Washington's Revolutionary War precedents shape the powers of modern presidents today."

“Whether we are debating NSA surveillance, immigration, or even drones, the founding era directly affects today,” he said. “When you scratch the surface of technology’s veneer, it is fundamentally about the same issues our founders faced: what are the powers of government vs. the rights of citizens. “

### **Unique background**

Zvi Rosen, an assistant professor of law, recommended Beirne present this year’s lecture. He notes Beirne’s varied background as a lecturer, legal historian, businessman and author. In discussing presidential power through history, Beirne’s presentation “will further reflect his deep and unique knowledge and experience,” Rosen said.

“I hope the audience took away a new appreciation of how past is prologue, and the context of understanding the evolution of presidential power through the centuries,” Rosen said.

Beirne met with SIU student groups and visited classes while he is on campus, including Rosen’s business organizations class. Rosen was excited for Beirne to visit the class given Beirne’s experience on Wall Street, where Beirne worked in investment banking for JP Morgan and private equity for GE Equity.

Beirne earned his bachelor’s degree in finance from Fairfield University and his law degree from Yale Law School. He was also a Fulbright Scholar at Queen’s University.

“I am honored to give the Simonds Lecture and strive to empower our audience with the information they need to lead the United States into a better future — working to further our great nation as they deem best,” Beirne said.

### **Seventh lecture in series**

The series was established in 2015 through a gift from Emma K. “Katy” Simonds. The funds support a lecture, symposium or debate on a topic of current or recurring public interest, which explores commonsense solutions to issues related to the common good by applying principles of limited government, popular sovereignty, personal liberty, personal responsibility and federalism.

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## **Research & Innovation**

# **FRANK G. HOUDEK, EMERITUS PROFESSOR. CHRONICLES SIU SCHOOL OF LAW'S 50-YEAR HISTORY AS A 'LABOR OF LOVE'**

By Pete Rosenbery





Frank G. Houdek has been affiliated with the Southern Illinois University School of Law for nearly 80% of a storied history that is now in its 51st year.

In piecing together “Celebrating the First Fifty Years of Southern Illinois University School of Law,” Houdek, an emeritus law professor who during his tenure was law school library director, associate dean for academic affairs and interim dean, said the work provided perspective.

“For me it was like going back and remembering all these things and being reminded of all this great stuff,” he said. “When you are in the heart of an enterprise, most people I think tend to identify all of the issues or problems. But by stepping out of the middle and getting the big picture as I was putting it together, I was reminded that we have done a lot of impressive things with resources that at times were robust but at a lot of other times weren’t so robust. But what we managed to do with a small group of very dedicated people — faculty, staff and students — was to accomplish a lot, and we continue to accomplish a lot.”

The commemorative book, whose genesis started in fall 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, is part of the law school’s 50th anniversary celebration. The book will be available for purchase at the law school’s gala on March 23 at Southern Illinois Airport’s Hangar One Event Center, in the Law Library merchandise store and online through SIU Press.

“As we turn the pages of this commemorative book, let us remember the countless individuals who have contributed to our success and reaffirm our dedication to educating the next generation of legal scholars and practitioners. Here’s to the next 50 years of legal innovation and commitment to excellence,” Dean Camille Davidson said.

### **Full of photos and ‘firsts’**

The 164-page book includes over 200 photos and is stocked with information and interesting facts, along with many “firsts” in the law school’s history, such as the first class on Sept. 4, 1973, was taught by Professor Edward J. “Ted” Kionka. Divided in two



parts, the book breaks down the highlights and accomplishments by decade, including the leaders, faculty and staff during each period. The second part is devoted to photos featuring law school life and activities, along with faculty and staff through the years.

“I tried to identify either important events in the law school’s history or special people in the life of the law school — students, faculty and staff,” said Houdek.

### **Hiram H. Lesar’s continuing impact**

Houdek came to SIU in January 1985 and worked alongside Hiram H. Lesar after Lesar’s retirement as founding dean in 1980. Lesar continued to teach a class or two each semester before his death in 1997. Houdek said before researching for the book he “probably didn’t understand how much” Lesar accomplished in building the law school upon Lesar’s arrival in 1972. Houdek said he hopes others are able to recall fond memories or learn more about Lesar’s vision, noting that the law school’s mission to serve the public good and improve available legal services and attorney access in the region remains. Lesar also twice served as SIU Carbondale’s interim president (now chancellor) while law school dean.

“We’ve had eight permanent deans and each one of them has brought something to the table,” Houdek said. “Each one of them contributed to the development and growth of the law school. As I was trying to identify what was important in a particular time period, I would see the imprint of those deans.”

### **Desires for the book**

Houdek hopes readers “can gain or regain an understanding of what the school has been able to accomplish, not only for the university but especially for the region.” He pointed to the law school’s legal clinic and health law program as a “huge part of what we have done for the region and community to provide that kind of legal assistance.”

When he came to the law school nearly 40 years ago from Los Angeles, Houdek notes he had never lived in the Midwest, never lived in a small town and “never lived where there was humidity.”

“I stayed and never regretted that decision. For me, this book was a labor of love.”

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