

Trial Advocacy
Law 537-001
Spring 2026

SYLLABUS

Professor Julie A. Thompson
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Monday, 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Classroom 108 (courtroom) in Lesar Law Building

Course Description and Learning Objectives

The purpose of this course is to build the foundational skills you will need to try a bench trial and a jury trial in a courtroom setting. This trial advocacy course will focus exclusively on those skills. There are three course objectives: 1) to achieve mastery of basic trial skills, including case analysis, opening statement, closing argument, direct and cross-examinations, and the admission of various types of physical and testimonial evidence; 2) to try two cases in an actual adversarial courtroom setting; and 3) to develop confidence in public speaking, courtroom procedures, and the use of physical evidence. Additionally, students will be able to critique the adversarial system for its ability to provide equitable access to justice.

Office Hours

No specific office hours will be kept. I am always available to meet with students before or after class, and specific individual meetings can always be requested by any student. Also, I can be contacted by text message to my cell phone between 9:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. any day of the week to discuss problems or answer questions. Students can also contact me by email with questions, but use the gmail address above, as I do not routinely check my SIU email account.

Required Textbooks and Materials

Mastering Trial Advocacy, Charles H. Rose III and Laura Anne Rose
(Thomson West, 2d ed., 2020) ISBN: 978-1-68467-121-2

Case Files: You will be provided with necessary case files.

Advocacy Resource Center (ARC): You may use video taped lectures, articles and other information from Stetson University College of Law's Advocacy Resource Center at <https://www2.stetson.edu/advocacy-resource-center>. There are video discussions and demonstrations on all aspects of trial advocacy. Reviewing the applicable video for each class meeting is suggested, but not required.

You will also need access to the following materials, all of which are available on-line through free public access: Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, Illinois Code of Civil Procedure, Illinois Code of Criminal Procedure, Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct, Federal Rules of Evidence, Illinois

Rules of Evidence, Local Rules of the Circuit Courts of Illinois, as well as everything you've ever known.

Additional Recommended Materials (for those who plan a litigation career)

Evidentiary Foundations by Edward J. Imwinkelried, gives the script for laying a foundation for the admissibility of all types of evidence. Any edition is useful, but the more recent editions contain foundations for electronic evidence (Facebook messages, emails, texts, etc.).

Trial Handbook for Illinois Lawyers, Robert S. Hunter, Thomson West. There is a set for criminal, civil, homicide and sentencing. These are heavily relied upon by trial attorneys and trial judges regarding the admissibility of all types of evidence at trial.

Class Meetings

Prior to each class meeting, there will be specific reading assignments that must be completed before you arrive to class.

During class, we may discuss the assigned materials, but I do not teach from the book. The class will consist of lectures, reviews of articles and videos applicable to the class topic, and skill drills focusing on all aspects of trial advocacy.

Basic Rules for Class

It is critical that you adhere to the following rules in order to achieve the goals/objectives referenced above.

1. Dress: For the class skills sessions and trials, you must wear courtroom appropriate attire. The class schedule will tell you whether courtroom dress is necessary.

2. Computers: No computers or personal electronic devices are permitted in this class. The only exception is that I will allow you to use a cell phone to photograph the chalkboard. Bring your textbook, any written assignments, and legal pads/pens for notes.

3. Class Participation: If you are in the room, you are participating. You are not allowed to "note out," "pass," or decline to participate, whether as an attorney, witness, or observer. This class requires a commitment of your time and attention, and you must be prepared for class every time. This class is designed to teach you trial practice skills for the real world, where trial work occurs with and in front of other people, including opposing counsel, clients, judges, bailiffs, witnesses, court reporters, circuit clerks and court watchers. Also, none of you currently have the ability to "wing-it" at this point in your training. Cases are very often won or lost based on the preparation that occurs before anyone walks into the courtroom. Do the work or you will not be an effective advocate for your client (and it will be reflected in your performance as well as your grade).

4. Punctuality: Please arrive on time for all classes. I will start without you, but I will not lock you out.

5. Partners: The jury trial exercise during the semester requires a partner. Depending on enrollment numbers, it is possible that someone may have to try a

case without a partner or try a case twice. If we have an odd number of students and you prefer to work alone, let me know as soon as possible. I will make the final decision on partners when I provide you the trial file for your jury trial.

Grading and Assignments

This course is graded. It is not offered pass/fail. Law school rules provide that the median grade will be between 2.8 and 3.2. Individual instructions for each assignment are included in the weekly class information. Your final class grade will be based on the following:

1. **Jury Trial Notebooks/Bar Prep Assignment** is 10% of the final grade. The trial notebook will be reviewed the night of your jury trial.

2. **Weekly Advocacy Exercises** (Prepared/Unprepared). In class, you will perform certain skills and receive critique and coaching from your professor. These performances are worth 5 points each if you are prepared and 0 points if you are not prepared. The exercises are 5% of your final grade.

3. The **courtroom observation paper** is worth 10% of your final grade. It should be three to five pages long and explain what you observed during three hours of court-watching. I prefer that you observe a jury trial, but understand that those are not always available. If not a trial, then an active courtroom where a judge is hearing motions or handling a larger docket. If you are interested, you can seek court consent to observe in juvenile court or adoption court as a student. The paper should include the name of the County and the sitting judge, as well as who was in the courtroom, what type of case was handled, what did the lawyers do, what did the judge do, how did the litigants act, was a decision made, what did you learn? If you got to see a trial, tell me the story that you heard and what you thought about it.

4. **Bench Trial** is 20% of your final grade. You will try a case with one witness per side. You will give an opening statement, present a direct examination, conduct a cross-examination, and give a closing argument.

5. The **exhibits introduction demonstration** is 5% of your final grade. It is worth 0 to 5 points. The laying of a proper foundation so that an item is admissible is worth 3 points, and the explanation for that foundation is worth 2 points. If an item is not admitted due to a lack of adequate foundation, no points will be awarded. However, counsel will be allowed multiple attempts to lay the appropriate foundation, but one point per attempt will be deducted from your grade.

6. **Jury Trial** is 50% of your final grade and serves as your final examination. You and your partner will try a jury case. You will give either the opening or closing and conduct one direct exam and one cross exam of a witness. Depending on the number of students in class, one or more students may be needed to volunteer to perform more than one jury trial. If this is necessary, I will advise of special grading rules for those individuals before I ask the class for volunteers.

7. The **self-assessment** must be submitted to me by email no later than April 24, 2026. The self-assessment is not graded, but failure to submit it will result in a failing grade. The self-assessment will discuss what you learned about the three questions you had when class began.

8. All assignments must be timely completed to pass this course. You will not pass this class unless you complete each component of the class, and no exceptions will be made.

9. Written assignments are due by submitting them to me in class on the date due or to my email, juliethompsonlaw@gmail.com, no later than 11:59 p.m. on the date due.

Workload

The American Bar Association standards for accrediting law schools contain a formula for calculating the amount of work that constitutes one credit hour. Under the ABA standards, you should expect to spend 150 minutes per week in class (2.5 hours), plus (a minimum of) six hours of study a week, for a total of 8.5 hours per week of work. Please understand from the beginning that this class carries a heavy workload, much like a trial practice will carry a heavy workload.

Attendance Policy

In a skills class, you will not learn if you are not present. An advocacy course absolutely requires your presence so you can learn, and through you, others can learn. Do not skip class because you cannot make it up later, and each skill builds upon the last skill you learned. If you absolutely must miss a class for some extraordinary reason, please notify me as far in advance as possible so that we can attempt to minimize the impact on you and your classmates.

Notice of Recording Policy

These class sessions will not be recorded either by video or audio recording device other than the Echo program run by the law school. If a student wishes to have classes recorded in another way, please bring that to my attention and if the rest of the class agrees, I will reconsider the issue of recording classes. Furthermore, it is a violation of the Honor Code for any student to create and/or distribute such class recordings when the instructor has prohibited class recording.

Style and Format of All Writing Assignments

Documents shall be on standard paper using an easily readable 12 point font with double-spaced text with a one-inch surrounding margin.

Final Exam

There is no written final examination for this course.

Make-up Classes

There is the need for three make-up classes this semester. (One for MLK Day, one for Spring Break, and one to cover the final exam period).

The missed time for two of these classes will be made-up by extending the class period for classes 1 through 10 to end at 8:30 p.m..

The third of these will be made-up by writing the courtroom observation paper listed above in paragraph three. The paper is due no later than April 6, 2026

at 11:59 p.m.

Class Schedule

January 12, 2026 (Class1): Story Telling and what happens in a trial.

Read Chapter 1 on How Trials Work and be prepared to discuss it in class.

Receive case file on Derek Steele.

Discuss trial notebooks.

Bring a written list of three things you want to learn from this class to submit to me, and make a copy to keep for yourself.

No Courtroom Dress for class.

January 19, 2026, MLK DAY, No Class

January 26, 2026 (Class 2) Theme and Theory and how to tell the story.

Read chapter 2 on Case Analysis and Preparation, and the case file on Derek Steele.

Research law on elements of the offense and any possible defenses.

Begin case analysis and come to class with the beginnings of two trial notebooks for Derek Steele's case, one as the prosecutor and one as defense counsel.

We will conduct case analysis on Steele during class.

No Courtroom Dress for class.

February 2, 2026 (Class 3) Opening Statements.

Read chapter 4 on opening statements.

Prepare and be ready to perform an opening statement for Derek Steele's case as both prosecutor and defense counsel.

Courtroom Dress for class.

February 9, 2026 (Class 4) Direct Examinations.

Read chapter 5 on direct examination and prepare defense counsel's direct examination of Derek Steele and the prosecutor's direct examination of Officer Parker and be ready to perform both.

Courtroom Dress for class.

February 16, 2026 (Class 5) Cross-Examinations.

Read chapter 7 on cross-examinations.

Prepare the prosecutor's cross-examination of Derek Steele and defense counsel's cross examination of Officer Parker and be ready to perform both.

Courtroom Dress for Class.

February 23, 2026 (Class 6) Closing arguments.

Read chapter 11 on closing arguments.

Prepare the prosecution and defense closing argument and be ready to perform both.

During class, you will make notes for a rebuttal argument for the prosecution and perform it also.

Courtroom Dress for Class.

March 2, 2026 (Class 7) Bench Trial.

Students will perform a bench trial in the Steele case.

Courtroom Dress for Class for those performing. All other students must attend but may dress casually.

March 9, 2026 SPRING BREAK, No Class

March 16, 2026 (Class 8) Bench Trial.

Students will perform a bench trial in the Steele case.

Courtroom Dress for Class for those performing. All other students must attend but may dress casually.

Students will receive jury trial case file and partner assignments, and trial teams will receive items for foundation demonstration class 11.

March 23, 2026 (Class 9) Advanced examinations.

Read chapter 9 on advanced direct and cross.

Younger impeachment video will be shown during class.

Begin case analysis on jury trial case files.

No Courtroom Dress for class.

March 30, 2026 (Class 10) Exhibits demonstrations.

Read chapter 6 on exhibits.

Direct examination with exhibits will be taught and demonstrated by the trial teams using various items and laying various foundations for admissibility of those items into evidence.

After the demonstration, students will explain to the class the reasons for the foundation method they chose for each item.

Students will receive credit if their items of evidence are admitted as evidence.

Jury Trial Preparation. Each group of plaintiff attorneys will meet privately with professor during the last one-half hour of class to review trial notebooks and discuss their trial plan

April 6, 2026 (Class 11) Expert witnesses and jury selection

Read chapter 10 on expert witnesses and chapter 3 on jury selection.

No Courtroom Dress for class.

Jury Trial Preparation. Each group of defense attorneys will meet privately with professor during the last one-half hour of class to review trial notebooks and discuss their trial plan.

Courtroom observation paper is due.

April 13, 2026 (Class 12) Jury Trial.
Dress for Courtroom.

April 20, 2026 (Class 13) Jury Trial.
Dress for Courtroom.