



## Professor Emerita Bobbie Thyfault '84: AN ADVOCATE FOR ADVOCATES



When an alumnus becomes synonymous with her alma mater, it's only appropriate that the institution take on her name. Unsurprisingly, this year, the Bobbie Thyfault Appellate Competition was created, honoring someone who has been a contributing member of the California Western community for over 30 years—as a student, professor, mentor, donor, and alumni board member. This past spring, the Moot Court Honors Board hosted the inaugural competition, giving appropriate honor to someone who has dedicated most of her career to nurturing aspiring advocates.

"It is important for me to support the school because CWSL gave me the opportunity to study law and to become a lawyer," says Professor Emerita Bobbie Thyfault, who is from Denver and never imagined spending most of her career in San Diego. When she applied to law school, she hoped to stay in Colorado with her two small children, but when she wasn't accepted to those schools, she quickly put California Western at the top of the list: "It didn't hurt that the school sent out catalogs with a picture of a sunset and a sailboat on the cover. I learned that plan B is often the best plan, and I've told that to my students over the years."

The California Western community can call itself incredibly lucky to have been Bobbie's plan B. As a student, she laid down roots that continue to grow to this day. "My favorite memory is the friendships I made. I had a group of friends, all of whom were, like me, older students. We had a great time together." Bobbie also notes that she was pleasantly surprised to find that although more than 80% of the student body was men, most of her professors were women, including Professor Theresa De St. Phalle (criminal law), Janet Motley (now Professor Emerita Janet

Weinstein—torts), and Professor Katharine Rosenberry (Property): "It was very encouraging for me to come into a traditionally male environment and see successful female role models." Bobbie and her friends also "remember fondly our time in Professor Stiglitz's Civil Procedure class. Professor Stiglitz taught me how to be prepared as an attorney." Embedded in a nurturing legal community, Bobbie became an accomplished student, a member of the Law Review, and an Honors instructor, teaching 1L's legal skills beginning in her second year.

"CWSL gave us the foundational knowledge and skills we needed to succeed in our chosen professions," says Bobbie, who graduated magna cum laude in 1984, passed the bar in Colorado and California, and was prepared to clerk right away for U.S. District and Circuit Court judges. She was able to parlay these opportunities into work as a court-appointed criminal defense appellate attorney, first at Appellate Defenders, Inc., then as a solo practitioner, arguing cases before the First and Fourth Appellate Districts in California, the California Supreme Court, and the Ninth Circuit.

In 1999, Bobbie returned to California Western, first as an adjunct and then as a full-time professor. "A legal education opens so many doors," says Bobbie, who taught Legal Skills, the Externship Seminar, and the Legal Scholarship Training Seminar, and was the director of the Legal Skills program from 2005 to 2019. "Each year, students come to CWSL from across the U.S. and from around the world to study law. They are eager to learn and to take their knowledge and skills back to their communities to help ensure that everyone has access to justice."

Among her many contributions, Bobbie has had an outsized influence on campus as a mentor in the Competitive Advocacy Program (CAP), having coached the Jessup International Law Moot Court team for over 20 years, alongside Professor William Aceves and Kate Clark '10. "I am impressed by the character of the students who participate in the program and by the coaches, many of whom are alums, who devote hours of their time to training the students," says Bobbie, who is often too humble to take credit for the recent CAP accomplishments she has helped facilitate:

**First place Memorial Award (briefs) in the U.S. West Region;** the team's memorials advanced to International Rounds in D.C. and were awarded the Richard Baxter Memorial Award for the third-best respondent's memorial in the world and the Hardy C. Dillard Memorial Award for Best Combined Memorials, ninth place in the world (2024).

**Second place for Best Memorial in the Regional Competition - (2023)**

**Seventh place for Best Memorial in the Nation;** advanced to the Final National Round of The Top 32 Law Schools Based on Oral Arguments - (2022)

As Paul Parisi, the director of CAP notes, "Jessup is the oldest, largest, and most prestigious moot court competition in the world. The fact that every year our Jessup team does well is impressive, but when you consider they are doing better than many highly ranked law schools out there, it shows you that Cal Western students can hang with the best of them!"

In addition to her mentorship, Bobbie has been a consistent and generous donor to California Western for 32 years. "We are very privileged to have had the opportunity to study law and graduate from CWSL. Our donations help support the students and help create access to justice for everyone," says Bobbie who, throughout the years, has given to the California Western Innocence and Justice Clinic, the Public Interest Law Foundation, the Moot Court Honors Board, the Latin American programs, the student emergency fund, and other impactful funds. In 2022, she left a donation to CAP in her estate plan: "The donation to the Competitive Advocacy Program is important to me because I see how hard the students and coaches work, and I know that the work prepares the students for successful careers. It will help ensure that the students and coaches will have the resources they need to continue to compete at the high levels they currently compete, and that future students can reap the benefits of the program."

Last year, California Western honored Bobbie as one of the school's Distinguished Alumni, and this year the MCHB created the Bobbie Thyfault Appellate Competition to honor her decades of service to CAP students. These accolades are more than well deserved, but Bobbie isn't planning to rest on her laurels anytime soon. Since her retirement in 2020, she has continued to dedicate her time and resources to CWSL, teaching as an adjunct in the Externship Program, coaching the Jessup team, and serving on the Alumni Board since 2021, not to mention her service on the Board of Directors of Appellate Defenders, Inc., and on the Lawyers Club of San Diego's Fund for Justice Committee.

Bobbie Thyfault represents the best of California Western—an advocate and an advocate for advocates, and we are lucky to have her as a pillar of our community.

