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Tribute to Professor Bonita K. Roberts

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**TRIBUTE
TO
PROFESSOR BONITA K. ROBERTS**

DAVE SCHLUETER*

When St. Mary's alumni review the history of the law school, they will find references to one of its stars—Professor Bonita Roberts—who was a critical member on the law school faculty for four decades. She distinguished herself as a talented leader of the Legal Research and Writing program, a stalwart supporter of the law school's advocacy programs, and the unofficial hostess and planner of numerous social events.

Professor Roberts joined the St. Mary's Law School faculty in 1981 to plan and facilitate the school's research and writing program. In that capacity, she oversaw the training of thousands of students' preparation on the finer and critically important points of legal research and effective written advocacy. During her decades of supervising the Legal Research and Writing program, she demonstrated amazing resilience in adapting to changes in legal publishing systems—from hard copy to electronic research.

Although for many first-year law students the course was not what they would consider the highlight of their first-year curriculum, that often changed when they returned to classes in their second year with stories of successfully using their legal research and writing skills during their summer internships. As the Associate Dean for Academics in the 1980s, I heard many suggestions from students on how to improve, change, or even reduce the Legal Research and Writing program. My answer to those students was that, in my experience, the program would prepare them for the practice of law—where oral and written advocacy skills would distinguish them from

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their peers. Professor Roberts's contributions to the Legal Research and Writing program are a rich and enduring legacy for our law students.

During her tenure as a faculty member, she served on several faculty committees, including the Advocacy Committee, a committee charged with working with the Board of Advocates and other advocacy programs, to ensure that they ran smoothly and professionally. In her capacity as a member of that committee—for nearly four decades—she was a loyal and dedicated member who staunchly supported the school's advocacy training and programs. As chair of that committee, I will be forever grateful for her strong support of our advocacy programs. Thanks to her contributions, the quality of the school's advocacy footprint increased, and as a result, the law school's reputation as a national leader in advocacy was enhanced.

In addition to her membership on the faculty Advocacy Committee, she coordinated the first-year moot court competition—now the Linda and Dave Schlueter First Year Moot Court Competition. From the very beginning of her time at St. Mary's, Professor Roberts selected the annual moot court problem, worked tirelessly in coordinating with the Board of Advocates to select judges for each round, found ample space for each evening's oral arguments, and ensured that the final round of the competition ran smoothly. One of her great successes in that competition was bringing in federal judges, members of the Texas Supreme Court, and in later years, the entire Fourth Court of Appeals to judge the final round. For her significant contributions in the school's advocacy programs, in 2019, Professor Roberts received the high honor of induction as an Honorary Member of the national Order of the Barristers.

Finally, in her tenure as a faculty member, Professor Roberts was the unofficial hostess of numerous law school social events—retirement dinners, annual Harlan Society luncheons, and the annual Barristers' Ball—to name just a few. In that capacity, she helped arrange the location, and most importantly, the menu. She was a real stickler for visiting the site of the event and sampling the proposed culinary options and took great pride in doing so. Thanks to her, the attendees always enjoyed the finest chocolate desserts.

Upon her retirement, Professor Roberts was named Professor of Law Emerita, the first female member of the law faculty to receive that honor. Fortunately, Professor Roberts has agreed to continue to teach on a part-time basis. As such, she will continue to build on her wonderful legacy as a teacher and mentor for countless students in the years to come.

Brava, Professor Roberts.