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In Honor of Professor Bonita K. Roberts

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TRIBUTE

IN HONOR OF PROFESSOR BONITA K. ROBERTS

**LINDA SCHLUETER
FAYE BRACEY**

It is our distinct privilege to write this tribute to our colleague and friend Professor Bonnie Roberts. She is a dedicated professor and a trailblazer for other women who joined the St. Mary's faculty, such as the two of us.

In the Fall of 1981, when she joined the faculty at St. Mary's School of Law, Professor Roberts was the first female tenure track faculty member. She was also the inaugural Director of the first-year Legal Research and Writing program. In her role as Director, she developed a demanding and robust research and writing component to the curriculum. This curriculum taught first-year students the skills and framework to effectively and efficiently find the law, giving them an advantage when they sought summer internships or entered the practice of law. Her door was always open to students and former students who sought her advice and counsel not only concerning legal research and writing, but on a myriad of other issues. She encouraged and expected her students to strive for excellence in their research, writing, and oral advocacy.

There were three writing projects each spring semester to prepare students for their internships and law practice. Students learned how to effectively analyze the law and apply it to the facts at hand so they could cogently communicate their results. The written components included an opinion letter to the client, a memorandum of law to the senior partner, and an appellate brief to the United States Supreme Court. The appellate brief taught students the proper format for the briefs and the strict Supreme Court rules for writing, printing, and submitting a brief to the Court.

The spring semesters also included an oral advocacy component whereby students learned the advocacy skills necessary to present an argument to an appellate court. Professor Roberts selected a moot court problem, which was the basis for the brief to the Supreme Court, and taught students how to present an oral argument. She spent countless hours working with the Board of Advocates, overseeing the moot court competition, and working with the *St. Mary's Law Journal* to select the annual best brief awards. She solicited donors to underwrite cash awards for the winners and coordinated the announcement of the awards at the annual *Law Journal* banquet. Because of her efforts, students strived to do more than just write for a grade; they aimed to be selected as the best in their section and, hopefully, the best brief overall. Her inclusion of oral advocacy in the first-year Legal Research and Writing class was not the norm. Professor Roberts once again set St. Mary's law students apart from students at other schools when it came to getting internships after the first year of law school.

Her passion was to teach law students to use precise and concise language. In particular, she admired Professor Richard Wydick, who advocated writing in "plain English." Professor Roberts used and emphasized his text on PLAIN ENGLISH FOR LAWYERS throughout the spring semesters. She would suggest that if a non-law student could not understand what was written, then the law student needed to delete "legalese" and write the opinion letter, memorandum, or appellate brief in plain English that could be understood even by non-lawyers such as clients.

In addition to always being available to students, she was there for her colleagues. She shared her notes and insights when Linda joined the faculty in 1983 and Faye in 1987. Her door was always open to us, as the three of us taught the course she had developed in Legal Research and Writing. We appreciated her time and insights as we began our teaching careers and have enjoyed a strong friendship for all these years.

In 1986, she and Linda wrote the text entitled LEGAL RESEARCH GUIDE: PATTERNS AND PRACTICE. It was a very different approach to finding the law from other texts on the subject. Utilizing a checklist approach and demonstrating a pattern to the research process, students learned how to do complete legal research while being confident in their research from start to finish. The text has been used by countless students and practitioners throughout the United States. Professor Roberts served as co-author of that text for seven editions from 1986 to 2019. Linda continues to co-author the book with Professor Zoe Niesel.

Over the years, methods for doing legal research advanced as technologies developed. Professor Roberts revised the program to include effective ways to utilize both hardcopy and electronic formats. She incorporated Westlaw and Lexis training into the spring semester curriculum and covered the use of other electronic sources as they developed, whether through the government or private companies. She dedicated herself to keeping pace with the ever-changing methods of legal research and encouraged that same dedicated practice for her students.

As she headed towards retirement, she worked with the law school administration and Law Success program to incorporate the Legal Research and Writing program into the Law Success curriculum. Because of her efforts, the foundations of the legal research, writing, and advocacy program she developed live on, continuing to enhance the students' ability to succeed as interns and ultimately practitioners.

Over the last forty years, Professor Roberts has demonstrated a love and commitment to teaching excellence. The over 4,000 St. Mary's students she has taught have benefited from her knowledge, experience, and expertise. She is engaging with students, and her classes are demanding and practical. She has graciously given her time and expertise to both current and former students. For the two of us, it has been an honor and privilege to call her a colleague and friend. We can sum it up in three words—job well done!