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## Instilling professionalism in a new generation

**L**ike many attorneys, I remember the day I graduated from law school. It was five years ago in the Michigan spring of 2008. I got dressed in my black robe, purple hood and tasseled mortarboard. I sat down with my peers. I listened to the commencement speaker talk of his journey from law student to NBA owner.

Then I stood up with my fellow graduates. I heard my name, walked across the stage, shook the hand of my school's dean and, in two short words, tried to convey all of my gratitude for three memorable years of legal education. As I walked off the stage, I saw my parents applauding. In that moment, I felt flush with pride at what I had accomplished and full of anticipation as to what lay ahead.

Four years later, I witnessed similar emotions at another law school ceremony, but this wasn't a graduation ceremony. It was an induction ceremony. In the fall of 2012, I represented the Commission on Professionalism at the Southern Illinois University School of Law's 11th annual induction ceremony. It marked the culmination of work that the SIU 1Ls had started in their Professionalism and the Law class.

In that class, the newly arrived first-years jointly drafted a professionalism oath. Several weeks later, in front of their friends and family, the entire 1L class stood before Illinois Supreme Court Justice Lloyd A. Karmeier and recited their newly written oath. I was privileged to then stand with Dean Cynthia Fountaine and Karmeier and greet each newly inducted student. As each name was said, they walked across the stage,

shook our hands and received a pin to symbolize their induction into law. I witnessed proud parents applaud for their children as they embarked on their new legal career.

The SIU induction ceremony was a model for the Commission on Professionalism and other Illinois law schools as we jointly developed a professionalism program for law school orientation. We are pleased to say that every Illinois law school now holds a professionalism orientation program for its incoming law students.

The program both welcomes law students to the profession and introduces them to core concepts of professionalism. The program has two components. The first, occurring at all of the participating law schools, involves students hearing remarks on professionalism by an Illinois Supreme Court or Appellate Court justice. At almost every law school, the justice also administers a pledge of professionalism. The pledge is a joint effort of the commission and the law schools and may be tailored to meet the specific needs of each law school.

The second component, which occurs at four of the schools (IIT Chicago-Kent, John Marshall, Northern Illinois and the University of Illinois), has the students breaking out into small groups for a "facilitated session" to consider and discuss assigned hypothetical scenarios that implicate a range of ethical issues. The small groups are facilitated by attorneys from the community who discuss with the students a lawyer's personal code of conduct and the choices students face as they begin their legal careers.

Illinois is one of several states

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around the country that has this type of professionalism orientation program. Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, New Jersey and North Carolina all conduct similar programs — dividing the incoming class into small groups and having attorney facilitators lead discussions on professionalism.

Georgia's Commission on Professionalism even provides programs for incoming 2Ls and 3Ls, including ones titled "Looking Ahead — Preparing for the Summer Experience" and "Debriefing the Summer Experience."

How important are these orientation programs? IIT Chicago-Kent second-year law student Adam Orr said, "The professionalism program was a welcomed surprise to our first-year orientation process. The pledge reaffirmed that feeling inside of me that I was about to embark on an exciting journey and become part of a professional community.

"The facilitated session allowed me to interact for the first time with fellow classmates and get an early taste of the importance of legal professionalism."

Julia Brook, a second-year student at the University of Illinois College of Law, echoed Orr's statement: "Reciting the

pledge meant more to me than reading the words off of the page; it represented the pride that the legal profession instills in law students.

"There was a strong sense that law school is more than three years of education — it is a commitment to a long-standing profession."

Indeed, as Commission Executive Director Jayne Rizzo Reardon said, "both students and the attorney facilitators report that it is reassuring and inspiring to stand and publicly dedicate or re-dedicate yourself to a life of service and professionalism."

This is a time of great change in the legal profession. Law students need the advice and guidance of legal practitioners today more than ever. We are happy to have so many justices and attorneys throughout our state volunteer for these professionalism orientation programs. With their combined experience, perspective and knowledge, they continue to provide an invaluable resource for new law students.

I will leave you with words from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor: "To me, the essence of professionalism is a commitment to develop one's skills to the fullest and to apply (them) responsibly to the problems at hand. Professionalism requires adherence to the highest ethical standards of conduct and a willingness to subordinate narrow self-interest in pursuit of the more fundamental goal of public service."

That sense of professionalism is what the commission's orientation program seeks to instill in the newest generation of attorneys. We thank the bench and bar for ensuring its success.