



NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CORPORATION COUNSEL

Michael A. Cardozo, *Corporation Counsel*

Press Release

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*For Immediate Release*

**NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT PROVIDES  
ONGOING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUNIOR LAWYERS  
THROUGH ITS ANNUAL TRIAL ADVOCACY PROGRAM**

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New York, June 11, 2004 – The New York City Law Department is hosting the office's Annual Civil Trial Advocacy Program that provides cutting-edge litigation training opportunities to its junior lawyers. The event, which began last week at the Law Department and is continuing this week at Fordham Law School, is designed to offer Assistant Corporation Counsels the opportunity to hone their trial practice legal skills by combining practical training with academic workshops.

The program, which is directed by Professor Michael W. Martin of Fordham Law, uses lectures and intensive legal seminars that are capped by mock trials. This year, 48 Assistant Corporation Counsels are participating. "The Law Department makes training for its junior attorneys a top priority," Corporation Counsel Michael A. Cardozo said. "This annual program shows the office's institutional commitment to developing the best attorneys who in turn become talented, aggressive advocates for New York City."

The program began last week at the Law Department with two lectures on developing case theory and *voir dire* (the process of selecting juries). It is continuing this week at Fordham with instructional teams composed of accomplished litigators, jurists and law professors from numerous law schools, including Columbia and New York University, working with the attorney participants. Discussion topics have included: shaping opening statements; handling direct and cross-examination of lay and expert witnesses; introducing documents into evidence; raising legal objections; making closing arguments; and other related legal issues. The program is culminating today in 12 full mock trials at Fordham University. Law students in the Law Department's Summer Program are serving as witnesses, and volunteers from local colleges, senior centers throughout the City, and interns from other City agencies are acting as jurors. In addition, judges and practitioners are serving as judges of the mock trial

"The Law Department is sending a message to law students and young attorneys that when you come to this agency, ongoing training will be provided. The Law Department has a commitment to making sure its lawyers are among the best-trained in the City," noted Professor Martin of Fordham. He added: "The program has been around for over a decade. It is part of the Corporation Counsel's resurgence as a real player in the legal market. Each year, the City's lawyers arrive sharper, more prepared and hungrier to learn more."

Professor Martin noted that the program has also attracted strong support from the legal community. "We get hundreds of responses from those who want to take part. We hire a very balanced faculty and try to have both practitioners and law professors, so we can offer a mix of training and teaching. They find it a very exciting event." Professor Cheryl Bader of Fordham Law School also assisted in planning and running the program.

Various junior lawyers participating in the program have already offered strong endorsements. Michael

Chestnov, a first-year attorney in the Law Department's Special Federal Litigation Division, noted: "I think all the feedback you get from the professors, attorneys and judges who come in and critique you is very helpful. They give excellent pointers." Chestnov gave several examples. "You might think an seems simple, like cross examination in court. However, they help you formulate the questions in a way where you get the witness to answer in a specific manner. It is a subtle skill that doesn't seem that difficult, but one might not pick up on it so easily if you hadn't participated in this program."

"Another thing I've learned is how much preparation you have to do when you go to trial," he added. "I've taken depositions before, but now I'm much better at it, because I'll have a clearer sense of where it's leading in the end. This has been a fantastic learning experience that I don't think I would have gotten anywhere else."

Sheila Gomez, a lateral attorney in the Tort Division's Medical Malpractice Unit, also praised the program. "This experience has broadened my expertise and helped me to understand better what I do on a day-to-day basis," she said. "I've learned about making appropriate motions before the trial actually proceeds and how to prepare and execute an opening statement. I've also learned that a trial is not about me but about my client. I've learned how to put on a witness and how to listen to what a witness has to say, especially how it will affect my case. The experience has helped me both on a personal level and on a professional level. I know I'll be able to use these skills in becoming a stronger attorney."

Several Law Department staff worked behind-the-scenes to develop the program with Professor Martin. The Law Department's Director of Professional Development, June Witterschein, supervised compliance for continuing legal education (CLE) requirements. Appeals Senior Counsel Victoria Scalzo oversaw the program's organizational elements, with assistance from Yvette Hughes of the Professional Development team. Also, more than 10 senior Law Department trial attorneys offered their services in acting as faculty.

The New York City Law Department is one of the oldest, largest and most dynamic law offices in the world, ranking among the top three largest law offices in New York City and the top three largest public law offices in the country. Tracing its roots back to the 1600's, the Department's 650-plus lawyers handle more than 100,000 cases and transactions each year in 17 separate legal divisions. The Corporation Counsel heads the Law Department and acts as legal counsel for the Mayor, elected officials, the City and all its agencies. The Department's attorneys represent the City on a vast array of civil litigation, legislative and legal issues and in the criminal prosecution of juveniles. Its web site can be accessed through the City government home page at [www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov) or via direct link at [www.nyc.gov/html/law/home.html](http://www.nyc.gov/html/law/home.html).

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