

A TRIBUTE TO THE TRAILBLAZING PROFESSOR CYNTHIA ADAMS

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I had the remarkable good fortune to work with, learn from, and laugh with Professor Cynthia Adams for nearly twenty-five years. Cynthia and I followed similar paths to law teaching as graduates of the part-time evening program at McKinney. Working one's way through law school brings a refreshing practicality and a desire to get the job done without the pretense and puffery sometimes found in the academy. Building on that foundation, Cynthia became a highly regarded teacher, a widely revered colleague and leader at the law school, and a force in the national and international legal writing community.

Those outside the legal academy may not appreciate the hierarchy of professors. Legal writing professors have long been at or near the bottom—paid considerably less, afforded lower status, and often not even regarded as “professors” or “faculty” but rather “instructors” or “lecturers.” In the spring of 2002, Dean Norm Lefstein spearheaded an effort to improve the status of legal writing faculty from instructors on year-to-year contracts to clinical professors who could earn tenure-like long-term contracts after demonstrating their excellence and national reputation in either teaching or service.

The legal writing faculty at McKinney, where I had just begun teaching, were eager to take on the challenge. We were incredibly fortunate to have Professor Adams as pioneering trailblazer (along with Professor Debby McGregor), the first to compile and submit their impressive dossiers—easily earning universal support of the faculty and university for promotion. Professor Adams's exceptional contributions to the law school were grounded both in her remarkable teaching and service work, but those early efforts were just the tip of the iceberg for all that followed.



The IU McKinney legal writing faculty in 2004. From left: Professor Schumm, Professor Adams, Professor Allison Martin, Professor Joan Ruhtenberg, Professor Ken Chestek, Professor Jim Dimitri, and Professor Debby McGregor.

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Few professors have taken on such a wide range of courses, and none have done it with the vigor and innovation of Professor Adams. Beyond the first-year writing course she taught throughout her three decades at the law school, Professor Adams taught other courses to help fill curricular needs and created new courses to share her expertise while broadening the curriculum, especially in the international and transactional realms. Professor Adams's teaching portfolio included Secured Transactions, Contract Drafting, Negotiations, Small Business Planning, Legal Communication and Analysis, Integrated Contracts, Contracts (hybrid), Civil Procedure, and Trusts and Estates.

Although many faculty find safety and comfort in teaching the same courses in the same ways, Professor Adams continually innovated and was always looking for ways to develop something new, different, and better. More importantly, she always did so in especially thoughtful and effective ways that are shared with others. While pioneering a writing course for foreign LL.M. students, she co-authored a book on the subject that is used at law schools in the United States and beyond.¹ A subsequent course on international contract drafting was quickly followed by a co-authored text, again used throughout the world.² Her transactional courses filled an important curricular gap while her efforts in online instruction, years before the COVID pandemic, paved the way for others. Professor Emeritus McGregor, who co-taught classes and co-authored a textbook, noted that Professor Adams was always incredibly prepared, engaged, and engaging. She would not only meticulously update her materials but would also be abreast of and incorporate technology.³

Instead of cruising into retirement, Professor Adams kept foot firmly on the gas to the end of the end. She developed two new courses in her final year of teaching—a hybrid contracts course for the evening students in the Spring of 2025 that included one-third asynchronous online content. And in the Fall of 2025, she completely revamped her asynchronous Contract Drafting class during her final semester of teaching. Among other things, that course fully tackled the promise and pitfalls of generative AI, a major component of the third edition of her Contract Drafting textbook a year earlier.

Beyond the classroom, Cynthia developed and nurtured important relationships that have created remarkable opportunities for our students to learn outside the classroom—including externship opportunities for Eli Lilly and, from scratch, law student teams that have earned national recognition in the LawMeet Transactional Negotiation competition.

Although Professor Adams's CV may detail her vast committee and administrative service, it does not begin to reflect the depth of her commitment and effectiveness. She served as chair of nearly every one of the most important

1. DEBORAH B. MCGREGOR, CYNTHIA M. ADAMS AND KATRINA LEE, *THE GUIDE TO U.S. LEGAL ANALYSIS AND WRITING* (Aspen 3d ed. 2022) (The Guide).

2. CYNTHIA M. ADAMS & PETER K. CRAMER, *DRAFTING CONTRACTS IN LEGAL ENGLISH: CROSS-BORDER AGREEMENTS GOVERNED BY U.S. LAW* (2013); see Peter K. Cramer, *A Tribute to Cynthia Adams*, 59 IND. L. REV. 599 (2026).

3. Email from Deborah B. McGregor, Professor Emerita, Ind. Univ. McKinney Sch. of L., to author (on file with author).

law school committees, such as the academic affairs (curriculum) committee and the colloquium committee through which she created a junior scholars' workshop. Professor Adams was elected by her colleagues whenever she ran for the executive committee, which is a testament to the enormous wisdom and insight she brought to every issue and discussion. When Professor Adams spoke, everyone at the law school paused to listen because of our respect for her thoughtful views and the care with which her words are chosen.

Beyond these remarkable contributions within the law school, Professor Adams was a terrific ambassador for the law school on the state, national, and world stage. Her textbooks have an international audience, as did many of her presentations. Having attended several conferences with Professor Adams, I can attest to her icon status on the national and international front. Knowing they will learn something new and profound, professors and practitioners flock to her presentations, including one at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law just weeks before her retirement.

The law school's legal writing program has long been ranked nationally because of the reputation of respect enjoyed by Professor Adams and its other faculty. Beyond her acclaimed textbooks and scores of renowned presentations, Professor Adams devoted her time and energy to mentoring others, through programs like the Sirico Scholars' Workshop and important committee work.

Newly appointed Dean Karen Bravo wisely chose Professor Adams to serve as Vice Dean in 2020, making her the first clinical faculty member to hold that role. True to form, Professor Adams excelled not merely in getting through the COVID-19 pandemic but in working tirelessly to improve the law school in ways big and small.⁴

Long-time LCA colleague Allison Martin, who later served as Vice Dean, put it well. Professor Adams "led with professionalism, integrity, and quiet confidence. She set a standard that others aspired to meet, not by demanding recognition, but by consistently doing the work well and doing it the right way. She opened doors through excellence, and in doing so, made it easier for those who followed to walk through them. . . . As she enters retirement, her legacy is firmly established—in the people she mentored, the paths she helped clear, and the example she set."⁵

As Cynthia Adams transitions to the next chapter of her life as a Ph.D. student in philosophy, she will continue to blaze new trails while countless students and professors, former and future, will benefit immensely from the trails she blazed for us.

4. See Karen E. Bravo, *A Paradigm of Excellence: A Tribute to Professor Cynthia Matson Adams*, 59 IND. L. REV. 595 (2026).

5. Email from Allison Martin, Vice Dean & Clinical Professor of Law, Ind. Univ. McKinney Sch. of L., to author (on file with author).