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Tribute to Professor Maureen Armour: A Teacher's Teacher

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TRIBUTE TO
PROFESSOR MAUREEN ARMOUR:
A TEACHER'S TEACHER

*Jessica Dixon Weaver**

PROFESSOR Maureen Armour was known for many things by her colleagues—her brash sense of humor, the distinct sound of her voice, her clear manner of teaching, and her poignant questions that really got to the heart of a matter. She was a mentor to me when I first began working in the SMU Clinics, and she was the primary person who taught me about developing a clinical pedagogy in my child advocacy course. While I had mentored many students and some lawyers prior to taking on my first role in academia as a clinician, my first time teaching was alongside Maureen. She taught me how to teach a client-centered class and how to allow students to find their way—to give them room to make their own mistakes and learn how to practice law with a safety net (us!). It was an exciting time, and she was a great cheerleader of both clinicians and student attorneys.

There are many tenets of teaching that I learned from Maureen, and among the first was showing respect to students and their ideas and strategies regarding the practice of law. Our clinics are like law firms, and the students and professors call each other by their first name. This “leveling of the playing field” in law school allows the students and professors to build legal cases as a team, where students take the lead. A simple custom—like what we called each other—was important to Maureen. It helped us form camaraderie with the students, and it also allowed for professors and students to have exchanges as peers, reducing the normal hierarchy in law school between teacher and pupil.

I also learned to push students to work harder in clinic and to perform in court to the best of their abilities. I recall a memorable case Maureen worked on with several students in 2002, and there was one student who she was most proud of because of how far he had come while he was in law school. The case involved a disabled paraplegic prisoner, and the stu-

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dent team she led secured one of the largest judgments ever awarded in a case brought by a law school clinic. Maureen and her students were often in the clinic late at night and on weekends working on the case. I would hear her telling the students to think more deeply about how they questioned witnesses and what they wanted to convey in their opening and closing statements. She had high standards, and there was extraordinary effort made by the students in this case. Observing her helped me guide my students preparing for jury trial, and I pushed them to rewrite their opening and closing statements in the same way that Maureen made her students dig in to represent their clients in the best way possible.

Maureen was often fearless in her approach to most things. I admired her mind and “can-do” spirit. One of the last things she taught me was that it is never too late to learn to teach a new subject. As she was nearing retirement, she chose to develop a new course in Elder Law. Based on the needs of community members and clinic clients she had represented, she expanded the law school curriculum to cover a growing legal area in which students were interested. She was an integral part of my journey as a law professor. I will remember her most for being a teacher’s teacher.