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Tribute to Professor Elizabeth Thornburg

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TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR ELIZABETH THORNBURG

*Jennifer Collins**

I am truly honored to introduce this tribute issue to the extraordinary Beth Thornburg. Professor Thornburg received her J.D. from SMU Dedman School of Law in 1979, where she was a member of the Order of the Coif and served as an editor on the *Journal of Air Law and Commerce*. Prior to joining the law school faculty in 1984, Professor Thornburg clerked for Judge Robert Hill in the Northern District of Texas and worked as an attorney at the law firm that is now Locke Lord. She has also been elected to membership in the American Law Institute.

Professor Thornburg has focused her career on issues related to civil procedure and alternative dispute resolution. She has written several books, including a study guide for Civil Procedure and two Texas procedure casebooks, all co-authored with fellow SMU Law professor William V. Dorsaneo III, and a co-authored volume entitled *Lawtalk: The Unknown Stories Behind Familiar Expressions*, published by Yale University. She has also written numerous law review articles, including extremely influential projects on the use of social media by the judiciary and lessons learned from the use of online courts during the pandemic. Her scholarly work was recognized with her appointment to the Richard R. Lee Endowed Professorship in 2014.

Equally important, Professor Thornburg is a master teacher who is not only a marvelous instructor in her own classes but also a leader for the rest of the law school and university in its ongoing efforts to provide an outstanding classroom experience to all students. For example, from 2012 to 2014, Professor Thornburg served as the Director of SMU's Center for Teaching Excellence. She took the lead at the law school in helping ensure that our faculty were as prepared as possible to provide excellent online instruction during the pandemic and in helping her colleagues adapt their courses to ensure they complied with new accreditation standards related to formative assessment and learning outcomes. Her efforts have been recognized with a number of important university-wide awards. In 2016, the university honored Professor Thornburg with the Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor Award, an annual award recognizing four SMU faculty members for their notable commitment to and achievements in fostering student learning. In 2013, SMU selected her to

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receive the University Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award, an award established by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church to recognize outstanding faculty members for their dedication and contributions to the learning arts and the institution. Her students adore her, repeatedly praising her as an “amazing” and “kind” professor who provided the single best learning experience they had in their first year of law school. I do not believe I have ever met a faculty member who works harder than Professor Thornburg to ensure that our students receive the very best education possible.

Professor Thornburg is also an incredible community member and institutional citizen who is unbelievably generous with her time and ideas. After two years as director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, most faculty members would have enjoyed a very well-deserved sabbatical. Not Professor Thornburg. She graciously and selflessly agreed to serve as my Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, an absolutely essential role in terms of supporting a dean who was brand new to SMU. Her advice, wisdom, and guidance during her three years in the role were invaluable. Professor Thornburg possesses vast historical knowledge about the law school, deep relationships in the community, and a constant willingness to innovate and improve. She strengthened our orientation program, diversified our pool of adjuncts, helped the law school comply with ever-evolving accreditation requirements, and worked tirelessly to help faculty incorporate new technology and assessment methods into their courses. She did all this with an endless supply of patience, unceasing good humor, boundless energy and enthusiasm, and a deep love for this law school and our students. She is truly the epitome of both a teacher-scholar and a servant leader. The entire law school community will miss Professor Thornburg terribly, and we are profoundly grateful for all she has meant to SMU.