

NEWSLETTER OF THE DOWNSTATE ILLINOIS INNOCENCE PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT SPRINGFIELD / CENTER FOR LEGAL STUDIES

First Class of Students Show It Can Be Done

Students enrolled in the closing Legal Studies undergraduate seminar on Wrongful Convictions successfully demonstrated there is student interest, they have the needed skills to do the job, and the seminar format will work.

Students were asked to either examine proposed legislative reforms of the criminal justice system that would reduce the potential for wrongful convictions or conduct an investigation of the Randy Woitke or Keith Harris cases.

The Woitke case was on remand for a new trial. There was evidence to indicate that another person had committed the murder and that Woitke was innocent. The students followed the retrial of the case, focusing on a ruling by the new trial judge denying admissibility of any

evidence implicating the other person. Prior to the end of the semester Woitke was found innocent by the trial jury and released.



While the students conducted their investigation, a judge ruled that Harris had been wrongfully sentenced, reduced his sentence, and released him for time served.

Keith Harris was convicted in 1978 of attempted murder, a crime that another man confessed to committing. Two police investigators said that he had been wrongfully convicted at a Prisoner Review Board hearing. Harris is seeking executive clemency requesting that his sentence be commuted to time served.

Asked to look at the possibility of his innocence, students pored over transcripts and case files. As they did their work, they became convinced that

Harris is innocent. Even though the class ended, they are continuing work to support his clemency petition.

Workshop on Demystifying Scientific Evidence

The Downstate Innocence Project, in partnership with the Office of the State Appellate Defender, is planning a workshop later this fall for criminal defense attorneys, faculty members, and students on demystifying scientific evidence. Topics will include fingerprint, hair, fiber, and DNA evidence, as well as the limitations of scientific evidence.

Trainers will include crime scene technicians,

crime lab experts, a pathologist, a DNA expert, and/or members of the defense bar.

The workshop, which will be in Springfield, will either be free to participants or be the cost of their lunch. A tentative date has been set for November 16, 2001.

More information will follow at a later date.

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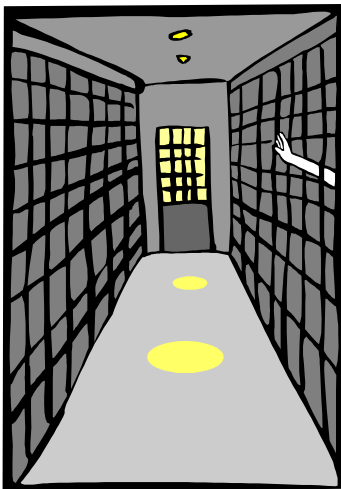


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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT
SPRINGFIELD/CENTER FOR
LEGAL STUDIES

P. O. Box 19243
Springfield, Illinois 62794
Phone: 217-206-6535
Fax: 217-206-7397

Currently, the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project conducts research and investigative activities in cases where there is a strong likelihood that an inmate is actually innocent. The Project involves students, who are taking a class on Wrongful Convictions as a part of their course of study at the University of Illinois at Springfield.



In recent years in Illinois, 13 death row inmates have been found to be wrongfully accused of murder.

Project Update

Faculty from legal studies, criminal justice and political studies are moving forward with plans to develop an Innocence Project at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Initial efforts slowed when Barry Scheck, DNA expert and coordinator of the National Innocence Project Network, cancelled a scheduled trip to Springfield as a speaker and when Professor Rob Schehr left the criminal justice program at UIS to take a faculty position in Arizona.

But the project is back on track. Accomplishments to date have included the following:

- the establishment of a project coordinating team made up of Larry Golden, Professor in the Political Studies and Legal Studies Departments, Nancy Ford, Associate Professor in the Legal Studies Department and Center for Legal Studies; and Bill Clutter, a private investigator in Spring-

field;

- the establishment of an Advisory Committee;
- the creation of a gift fund to receive tax-deductible contributions in support of the project; and
- the successful completion of the campus' first ever Wrongful Conviction course.

Project team members are currently identifying possible grant sources to fund Innocence Project activities, writing grant proposals, helping to organize a fall workshop on demystifying scientific evidence, and conducting follow-up activities related to last spring's class.

Plans for the spring are to offer a second Wrongful Conviction class and bring in a speaker of national renown to bring attention to the project and help raise funds to support it.