



NEWSLETTER OF THE DOWNSTATE ILLINOIS INNOCENCE PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT SPRINGFIELD / CENTER FOR LEGAL STUDIES

Innocence Project Hosts An Expert on Witness Misidentification

Professor Gary Wells, a national expert on witness misidentification, will speak at two forums on May 9, 2002. In the afternoon, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., he will present a workshop on witness misidentification for local attorneys. The workshop will be held at the Lincoln Land Community College and University of Illinois at Springfield Capital Center at 130 West Mason Street in downtown Springfield. From 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. Professor Wells will participate in a forum that includes UIS students, who will share their work on the Keith Harris case, one of three current cases being investigated by the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project. That event will be in the UIS Public Affairs Center, Conference Room H. It is open to the public and a re-



Gary Wells is an internationally recognized scholar in scientific psychology and his studies on eyewitness memory are widely known and cited.

ception will immediately follow the presentation and discussion.

Professor Wells holds the title of Distinguished Professor at Iowa State University. He has authored over 100 articles and chapters and two books. His article *Eyewitness Identification Procedures: Recommendations for Lineups and Photo Spreads* was cited in the Governor's Commission on Capital Punishment Report. Dr. Wells was a central member of the U. S. Department of Justice group that developed the first set of national guidelines for eyewitness evidence. His studies demonstrate that rates of mistaken eyewitness identification can be exacerbated by the methods used by crime investigators in conducting lineups and photo spreads.

The Innocence Project Receives Its Second Grant

The Downstate Illinois Innocence Project received a grant in April from the Poverty, Justice and Peace Fund of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield. The Fund supports projects that promote human dignity and generate cooperation among and within diverse groups.

Grant funds will support research and re-investigation of cases by UIS students where

there is a strong likelihood that an inmate is actually innocent.

The project will continue to involve students through a variety of service learning opportunities.

Funds will be used to help pay the costs of conducting investigations and duplicating court records and files.

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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.

National Conference Looks at Issues and Cases of Wrongful Convictions

The Criminal Justice Institute of Harvard Law School hosted a conference on April 19-20, 2002 in Boston that brought together experts and participants from 32 states, Canada and England.

The conference covered the whole landscape of wrongful conviction issues, including coerced confessions, the problems of jail-house snitches and other informants, the problems of eyewitness misidentification, and the use of DNA evidence.

Governor George Ryan was featured as a keynote speaker, talking on the subject of the newly released Commission on Capital Punishment Report and Illinois' moratorium on use of the death penalty. Conference presenters included defense attorneys, scholars, judges, prosecutors, and members of law enforcement. Twenty persons who were exonerated of crimes ranging from rape to murder told their stories.

Nancy Ford, Professor of Legal Studies and Public Affairs, and Sara Howell, graduate student in the Political Studies Department, attended and represented the Innocence Project.

Cases Involve 23 Students in Legal Research and Investigative Activities

The Legal Studies Undergraduate Closing Seminar this semester focused on the topic of Wrongful Convictions for the second year in a row.

Twenty-three students enrolled in the course. They included undergraduate students scheduled to graduate in May, as well as a Political Studies student who is interested in the subject. Students were given the option of working on actual innocence cases or related legislative issues. All students chose to work on cases.

A number of students continued work on the Keith Harris case begun last spring. Keith Harris was convicted of the armed robbery and attempted murder of a man based primarily on faulty eyewitness testimony. Recently released from jail on other grounds, he is seeking exoneration from Governor Ryan.

Others students evaluated crime scene evidence, trial transcripts and police reports, and developed a list of alternative suspects in a

case involving a man convicted of murder in the late 1980s and sentenced to death. He and others have steadfastly claimed his innocence, and his case has been featured on 48 Hours and in articles in the *Chicago Tribune*.

A third group of students conducted legal research and helped reinvestigate a murder conviction of a central Illinois man, who new witnesses now say could not have committed the crime.

The course was taught by Larry Golden, Professor of Political Studies and Legal Studies. He was assisted by Bill Clutter, a graduate of the legal studies program who is now a local investigator, Joy Gosnell, a master's degree candidate in legal studies, and Nancy Ford, Associate Professor of Legal Studies and Public Affairs.

Additional opportunities for student work on innocence cases will be available this fall and next spring.



Graduating Students in the Legal Studies Closing Undergraduate Seminar work on innocence cases.