

**Law
Schools**
A Special Report

Beyond the Usual Classwork

Area law schools undertake new projects covering everything from the blues to BMWs.

Just Imagine It's the Supremes

Imagine it's your first time arguing in front of the Supreme Court. You're a seasoned professional with years of trial experience, and you've practiced your argument in front of the local law school moot court.

But when you get to the Supreme Court, you still feel out of your league. The justices are less than 10 feet away, and their near-semicircular bench is low to the ground so they're looking you right in the eye. You have to crane your neck to address the least senior members sitting at the ends of the row—no small matter in such a formal setting.

It is, in the words of Georgetown law professor Richard Lazarus, “most unsettling.”

Now, a replica of that courtroom will be the centerpiece of Georgetown University Law Center's new Supreme Court Institute building, opening this fall.

Lazarus says the mock courtroom copies the basic structure of the real thing, including the bench, the carpet, and the space separating the justices and the attorney.

For several years, the Supreme Court Institute has offered any lawyer with a case on the Court's docket the chance to practice her argument before a panel of mock judges—faculty members and other attorneys with high court experience. Usually, more than a dozen law students observe the moot court.

Lazarus notes that the exercises are “rigorous, not a cheer-leading session.” Yet, he says, many of the eligible attorneys have jumped at the chance to try their hand before they go before the real Court.

Many have also reported back that actually arguing in front of the justices was more intimidating than they had expected. Those comments led to the idea for the mock courtroom, Lazarus says.

“Any way that you can make people feel a little more at ease, the better,” says Lazarus. “The stakes are very high.”

—Kathleen Cullinan



HIGH COURT MOOT: Richard Lazarus (left) and Steven Goldblatt of Georgetown's Supreme Court Institute hope the school's model courtroom replicates the experience of arguing before the justices.