

Inaugural Edenfield Jurist in Residence

CLASS, LECTURE FOCUS ON SENTENCING

Chief Judge Lisa Godbey Wood (J.D.'90) served as the law school's inaugural Edenfield Jurist in Residence during the 2016–17 academic year and served as a Signature Lecturer for the university. Photo by UGA's Dorothy Kozlowski.

The law school's inaugural Edenfield Jurist in Residence, Lisa Godbey Wood, who was the chief judge for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia, not only taught a one-week course on sentencing this past fall but also served as a Signature Lecturer for the university.

The Edenfield Jurist in Residence position was created to honor the late U.S. District Court Judge B. Avant Edenfield (J.D.'58). Made possible by a contribution from 2003 Georgia Law alumnus Allen W. Yee, a former judicial clerk of the jurist, the program gives law students an opportunity to learn from federal judges through a series of mini-courses.

Delivering the Signature Lecture in the law school's Hatton Lovejoy Courtroom, Wood explained that sentencing is the most fascinating thing that happens in a courtroom.

"More than any other area of law, sentencing holds up a mirror to society and shows us who we are," she said. "What we see in that sentencing mirror says a lot about us — who we punish, how we punish them and how long we punish them."

In her almost 10 years as a federal judge, Wood estimated that she has sentenced nearly 1,000 defendants for everything from stealing endangered turtle eggs to

human trafficking, and the punishments have been just as varied. When considering a sentence, she said she turns to gifts from two mentors — an ancient Roman coin depicting Clementia, the Roman goddess of mercy, and a plaque bearing the Adam Smith quote, "Mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent."

She said that even "if we all agree on why we're sentencing and what the factors should be, it's hard to agree on what measure. It's a like a recipe that only tells you the ingredients."

According to Wood, sentences can have several purposes. They can suffice as retribution. They can serve as a deterrent. They can be used to rehabilitate defendants.

Wood said she does see promising reform for the sentencing process on the horizon. She mentioned that several states, including Georgia, are experimenting with ideas and taking a lead in those reforms.

"The public call is no longer to be 'tough on crime.' The public call is now to be 'smart on crime,'" she said.

Wood believes the person who will decide the sentencing matters as sentencing guidelines have helped ease some disparity

among sentences while still allowing judges to take into account personal things about the defendant or details about the crime.

"One thing I'm urging my students to do is to consider that as a specialty," she said.

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Wood, a 1990 *summa cum laude* graduate of the law school, was confirmed as a federal judge in January 2007 after being nominated by President George W. Bush. She served as chief judge from 2010 to 2017.

Previously, Wood served as the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Georgia.

Notably, she was the first woman to hold the chief judge position, and she was the first woman to serve as a U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Georgia.

Part of UGA's Fall 2016 Signature Lecture series, this event was also affiliated with the law school's Georgia Women in Law Lead initiative and was co-sponsored by the Women Law Students Association.

Portions of this article were taken, with permission, from coverage of the event written by Krista Richmond for Columns, UGA's faculty/staff newspaper.