



Professor Linda Henry Elrod '72

Faculty

“Learning, luck and a love of teaching” are the three “L’s” Professor Linda Elrod ’72 credits with her successful career. It is perhaps no accident that she uses alliteration to characterize her journey from childhood in Overland Park, to her position as Distinguished Professor of Law and Director of the Children and Family Law Center. She says her mother, a teacher, “instilled in me a lifelong love of learning and education.” Her father, Lyndus A. Henry ’48, instilled in her an appreciation for another “L”: the law.

As an undergraduate at Washburn, Prof. Elrod majored in English and planned to pursue a masters and PhD in English after an early graduation. However, the chair of the English department refused to count a course Prof. Elrod had taken abroad toward the requirements for her major. “Therefore, although I had met all graduation and certificate to teach requirements, I needed one hour of English,” recounted Prof. Elrod. She took the LSAT and petitioned the Law School to allow her to enroll “provisionally.” Her decision would be a turning point in her career. “I took one English course and three law courses in the spring semester of 1969. The rest is history.”

Prof. Elrod’s love of teaching continued through law school, and during her first two years as a law student, she taught ninth-grade English in the afternoons. She also served on the Law Journal and graduated as the only woman and first in her class from Washburn Law in December 1971.

In May 1973, Dean Raymond Spring invited her to teach a summer course in creditors’ rights. Students were so impressed that they suggested she be added to the faculty. Prof. Elrod taught legal methods, research and writing as an adjunct for the 1973-74 school year. In March 1974, Dean Spring asked her to teach Property. Prof. Elrod agreed to teach the additional class, even though she was seven months pregnant and already working full-time for the Kansas Judicial Council. “The next week, the faculty invited me to join full-time for the next fall,” said Prof. Elrod.

Thirty years later, Prof. Elrod continues to enjoy teaching and seeing students succeed in the classroom and beyond. “Seeing the light bulb go on [and] watching students grow and develop in their ability to make reasoned arguments” gives her a great deal of satisfaction. It is also rewarding to “watch former students become outstanding lawyers, judges, legislators, and citizens.”

Prof. Elrod is equally passionate about reforming the legal system to make positive changes for children and their parents. In addition to teaching courses on family law, she is Director of the Children and Family Law Center, former chair of the Family Law Section of the American Bar Association, editor of the Family Law Quarterly and has served as vice-chair of the Kansas Child Support Advisory Committee since 1984. She has published numerous articles and books on family law, including a national treatise, the first Kansas Family Law Handbook and a textbook for students. More recently, she co-authored a two-volume treatise with the late Hon. James Buchele ’66 that is part of the Kansas Law and Practice series published by Thomson-West.

In the fall of 2000, Prof. Elrod organized an international, interdisciplinary conference, “Reforming the System for Children in High Conflict Custody Cases,” at Wingspread, the Johnson Foundation in Racine, Wisconsin. The invitation-only event brought together judges, lawyers, mediators, psychologists, social workers, child custody advocates, court service officers and law professors, who gathered to devote three days to developing proposals to improve the current system. The result was a white paper that has served as a catalyst for reforms in the area of family law: Neutral Custody Evaluations, Model Standards of Practice for Family and Divorce Mediation; ABA Unified Family Court Coordinating Council; and Standards of Practice for Lawyers Representing Children in Custody Cases.

“Developing and convening the Wingspread Conference is my proudest professional accomplishment,” said Prof. Elrod. She looks forward to continuing her involvement in reforming the laws and hopes the Children and Family Law Center will be part of that effort. On a personal level, she was married to Mark Elrod ’72 for twenty-three years and reared two children, Carson and Bree. Both earned MFAs from NYU grad acting and work in Los Angeles.

Driven by a love of learning and teaching and a little “luck” (much of which she made herself), Prof. Elrod’s professional achievements to date extend well beyond the classroom. When asked where she sees herself in the future, she replied, “I have always felt that my job is to educate lawyers who will impact society. I will continue to research, write, teach and give CLE lectures to help lawyers do a better job of practicing law.”