



A Tradition of Excellence

The American Inns of Court Foundation is America's oldest, largest and fastest growing legal mentoring organization. With members nationwide, the sole, nonpartisan mission of the American Inns of Court is to foster excellence in professionalism, ethics, civility, and legal skills.



Who We Are

The American Inns of Court is an association of lawyers, judges and other legal professionals from all levels and backgrounds who share a passion for professional excellence. Through regular meetings, members are able to build and strengthen professional relationships; discuss fundamental concerns about professionalism and pressing legal issues of the day; share experiences and advice; exhort the utmost passion and dedication for the law; provide mentoring opportunities; and advance the highest levels of integrity, ethics and civility. Our Inns have gained a national and international reputation as an organization that bridges the gap between formal law school education and legal practice by offering career-long continuing education in the Common Law tradition.

This uniquely non-partisan association encourages meaningful mentoring relationships. We are one of the very few legal organizations that involve the whole spectrum of the profession: from law students to Supreme Court Justices; every level of federal and state judges; small firms to large firms; legal educators to law students. All have the opportunity to learn and grow without limit.

Membership is divided into “pupillage teams,” with each team consisting of a few members from each membership category depending on the members’ level of experience. Each pupillage team conducts one program for the Inn each year. Pupillage team members gather informally outside of monthly meetings in groups of two or more. This allows the less-experienced attorneys to become more effective advocates and counselors by learning from the more-experienced attorneys and judges.

In this collegial environment, outside the courtroom and pressure of daily practice, members discuss legal practice, principles and methods. Academicians, specialized practitioners and complementing generalists provide a mix of skill, theory, experience and passion. This fluid, side-by-side approach allows seasoned judges and attorneys to help shape students and newer lawyers with practical guidance in serving the law and seeking justice.

Our Noble Roots

In the late 1970s, Chief Justice of the United States Warren E. Burger often publicly voiced his concerns about the decline in professionalism and the shortcomings in the advocacy skills and ethics of American lawyers. Proclaiming the necessity for civility in “what is inherently a contentious human enterprise,” he explored ways to improve the quality of legal professionalism

in the United States. Finding a receptive audience for his message, he partnered with many giants of the law to arrive at a way to supplement American lawyers’ academic and technical training through the time-honored English tradition and practice of sharing wisdom, insight and experience of seasoned judges and lawyers with newer and aspiring practitioners.

This grass roots movement has blossomed into a structure of more than 375 affiliated, yet autonomous Inns. A large number of Inns concentrate on issues surrounding civil and criminal litigation practice, and include attorneys from a number of specialties. However, there are several Inns that specialize in criminal practice, federal litigation, tax law, administrative law, white-collar crime, bankruptcy, intellectual property, family law, employment and labor law, and even transactional law.

As other legal associations concentrated on studying the perceived problem and developing rules in an attempt to combat the maladies of waning professional practice standards, the American Inns of Court drew upon the wisdom and experience of seasoned practitioners to mentor, educate and inspire in its members the aspiration to a more craftsman-like application of the art and practice of law in America. Keeping this focus, the American Inns of Court soon earned a reputation as a truly unique organization.

To preserve momentum and ensure growth, the American Inns of Court Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, was established in 1985. The Foundation was designed to fulfill the mission of our Inns by promoting, establishing and chartering Inns throughout the U.S. to ensure the vitality and continuity of individual Inns; facilitate an exchange of ideas, experiences and ongoing education among members; and shape a culture of excellence in the legal profession.

How We Improve Professionalism

While the reach of the American Inns of Court has expanded, the number of lawyers in the United States has likewise expanded to nearly one million. For enhanced professionalism to take hold throughout the country, we must increase the proportion of lawyers we currently reach. For the concept to be successful, it must be a nationwide phenomenon. The leaders of the

“What [i]s imperatively needed [i]s more emphasis on professional ethics, on manners and deportment in the courtroom and in the practice; in short, the necessity for civility in what is inherently a contentious human enterprise.”

—Chief Justice Warren E. Burger

American Inns of Court firmly believe the more lawyers are connected to our Inns movement, the more effectively its noble mission and values will spread to positively influence all members of the profession. More than 150 of the 206 accredited law schools are currently participating with one or more Inns in some way. Though we are already connected to more than two-thirds of all accredited law schools, we want to reach out to more law schools in order to instill the key values of professionalism, civility, ethics, and legal excellence in the next generation of lawyers. Our vision is to offer unparalleled mentoring opportunities for lawyers who seek excellence in those values that will improve our society. Our growth is vital to the future of the legal profession.

The Future

A nexus clearly exists between lawyer behavior and the promotion and protection of the Rule of Law. Ethical breaches, incivility, discourteous treatment, disrespect toward judges, and failure to show concern for legal institutions undermine our system of laws. When lawyers forget their obligations to make the system work, the loser is the Rule of Law. Because of the relationship between professionalism and the American system of the Rule of Law, efforts of organizations like the American Inns of Court take on a special urgency.

The American Inns of Court is committed to raise the bar of professionalism in the United States because of a strong belief that the Rule of Law depends upon an honorable legal profession to guarantee respect for our vital legal institutions. Professionalism, mentoring, and ethical behavior are essential to maintaining the Rule of Law because it is only through adherence to these high ideals that the American public will rightly believe in the importance of our commitment to justice. Society's need for a credible system of justice and reliance upon the Rule of Law are too important to neglect the need to nurture professionalism among members of the profession charged with its protection and preservation. It is not enough that there are "pockets of professionalism" scattered throughout our national legal landscape.

"The American Inns of Court is committed to inspiring all lawyers to rise to the highest level of professional excellence. . . . I sincerely hope its vision continues to be realized."

—Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

Growth of professionalism movements like the American Inns of Court is vital to the future of the legal profession. Restored professionalism must precede and strengthen the practice of law. We reclaim our noble profession with small, meaningful steps. If enough motivated lawyers band together to elevate the level of professionalism in this country, those steps might well beget giant strides. The Rule of Law itself may well depend upon our progress.

What We Will Do Together!

- Strengthen our Society based on respect for the Rule of law
- Regain the trust and confidence of the American public in order to ensure respect for America's vital legal institutions
- Spread professional excellence
- Improve efficiency and caliber of law practice
- Invest in our youngest generation of lawyers so that they will be confident in their roles as Guardians of the Tenets of Professionalism



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