

SUMMER LAW INSTITUTE

Newsletter

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School of Law
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Law, Leadership, and the Power of Perspective at the St. John's SLI

On June 30, 2025, a group of rising ninth graders walked through the gates of St. John's University, riddled with apprehension, curiosity, and excitement. Representing communities across the local Queens borough and beyond, these 25 bright minds came together to tackle the rigor of Legal Outreach's Summer Law Institute, an intensive five-week journey into the heart of the criminal justice system that would redefine their perceptions of the future.

Throughout the summer, the St. John's SLI students blossomed into confident and courageous young scholars, navigating complex legal concepts and corporate law offices with ease. They read challenging texts, wrote compelling essays, took weekly exams, enhanced their public speaking skills, asked questions, connected with visiting attorneys and guest speakers, prepared for a mock trial, and shared *many* laughs.

Together, these 25 teens built a community rooted in resilience, advocacy, support, and ambition. They discovered that their backgrounds are not barriers, but fuel. To them, the Summer Law Institute was more than a program, but instead, a turning point. Congratulations to our St. John's students for staying the course and building a brighter future, and to our families and sponsors for believing in their potential!

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St. John's University School of Law

Meet the Staff



Yesslee Diaz
Legal Teaching Fellow

Ms. Yesslee Diaz is a rising 2L at Pace Law School, interested in practicing civil rights law and entertainment law. She is an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and of NBLSA. Yesslee received her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice, Juvenile Justice Concentration, from Temple University in 2022. Yesslee is often involved in social justice and advocacy efforts, and in her free time, she enjoys exploring new music, traveling, and spending time with family.



Alexandria Principe
Legal Teaching Fellow

Ms. Alexandria Principe is a rising 3L at Pace Law School and is from Millstone, NJ. At Pace Law, she is a member of SEALS, IPSO, and is an active member of the Wellness program. She received her bachelor's degree in Music Business and Legal Studies from Belmont University in 2023. Alex sees herself as an advocate for those around her and wants to pass on her passion for learning onto those younger than her. In her spare time, she likes to cook, paint, read, and spend as much time as possible at the beach.



Annick Niyonsaba
Coordinating Intern

Ms. Annick Niyonsaba, the Coordinating Intern at St. John's this summer, is a rising sophomore at Baruch College. She is majoring in Political Science and plans to attend law school after receiving her bachelor's. She enjoys quality time with her friends and family, as well as writing. This past semester, she has been heavily involved in volunteering and has explored different neighborhoods in Manhattan!

Field Trips



Pictured: Students at the Nassau County Courthouse

Our students started to build their sense of professionalism through weekly field trips to prestigious law firms and legal institutions. These institutions dissected for their young visitors their contributions to the legal profession, prepared tours and a mock negotiation activity, and provided the students with the opportunity to sit in on a trial and participate in a jury selection exercise. To our field trip hosts, thank you for being attentive to our students and for planning wonderful experiences!

Guest Speakers



Pictured: Students with Camila Morcos from Forchelli Deegan Terrana LLP

Every Monday through Friday, over the summer, our classroom was graced with visits from attorney guest speakers. Thank you for helping expand our students' visions for their futures!

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Workday

Workday's legal team spoke extensively about their professional journeys. Afterward, the students enjoyed lunch at the firm, with a view from the Empire State Building. While the students ate, they chatted with one another and with their attorney hosts. Then, they enjoyed a mock negotiation and wrapped up the day with a tour of the Empire State Building's rooftop. The main takeaway for our students was that even tech companies, like Workday, have a legal team on-site. This trip was their first exposure to the concept of "in-house counsel," and it inspired students to take an interest in corporate law.



Duane Morris LLP

The Duane Morris field trip began with an office tour. As the students walked through the hallways of the firm, they were greeted with warm smiles and friendly hellos. Some of our students are Suits fans and shared that, as they walked through the halls, they felt a surge of motivation. Following the tour, the students participated in a lunch-and-learn with Duane Morris attorneys. They learned about each of the attorneys' professional journeys, but were most impacted and learned from the way the attorneys carried themselves and the advice that they shared about making the most of high school.



Nassau County Supreme Court

Visiting the Nassau County Courthouse was a unique experience. The students learned about the public side of the legal system. They toured the courthouse and its library, watched videos that reinforced some of the concepts they learned in class, sat in on a trial, and participated in a jury selection activity. Most of our students had their first experience in a courtroom on this field trip and were kindly treated by the judges presiding over the courtrooms, as well as the plaintiff, defendant, their counsel, and witnesses. To our field trip hosts, this was an enriching experience for our students, thanks to the thoughtful planning on your part!



Mock Trial: Prosecution v. Defense

Students engaged with the knowledge they've learned over the summer through the Mock Trial competition. Inspired by Kai Cenat's giveaway riot in 2023, our case this year was State v. Bennett. In this case, Mr. Jay Bennett has been charged with Riot in the First Degree. The charge followed Mr. Bennett hosting a giveaway for five PS6s. Unfortunately, the event went horribly wrong when a larger-than-expected crowd showed up. Sonia Sinclair, one of the event attendees, was hit by a fire extinguisher, and Alliance Square suffered \$50,000 worth of damage. The case expanded on the source material to make it trickier for both sides to argue, including adding elements where the defendant was isolated in his blackout and soundproof vehicle, the manager was responsible for permits, text messages between the defendant and the manager showed knowledge, and other streamers were notifying the defendant about the crazed crowd.



Final Prosecution Team

Opening – Hailey Hu
Sonia Direct – Andrea Laljie
Sonia Sinclair – Rachel Jose Gonzalez
Buzz Direct – Andrew Carrillo
Buzz McHype – Amier Gruber
Maya Cross – Andrew Carrillo
Jay Cross – Noah Edwards
Closing – Noah Edwards

Semi-Final Prosecution Team

Azeem Baksh, Brady Boodhram, Garvens Charles, Malia Cort, Priya Cruz-Tillery, Emmanuel Jimenez, and Alyssa Mondesir

Final Defense Team

Opening – Samuel Jiang
Sonia Cross – Kailin Aarons
Buzz Cross – Nukaeya Isaac
Maya Direct – Nukaeya Isaac
Maya Reynolds – Khloe Fernandez
Jay Direct – Winston Cheung
Jay Bennett – William Ouedraogo
Closing – Winston Cheung

Semi-Final Defense Team

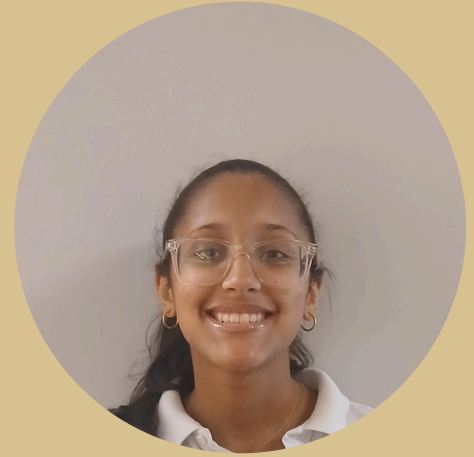
Noah Arvelo-Reyes, Torri Gaillot, Adrean Johnson, Allen Ortega, Ariannie Rodriguez, and Shawn Zhang

The prosecution presented its case, arguing that Mr. Bennet knowingly instigated a riot and was the sole cause of the damage to the area where his event was held and to innocent bystanders. They presented two witnesses: Ms. Sonia Sinclair, who was hurt during the riot, and Mr. Buzz McHype, who tried his hardest to warn Mr. Bennett during the riot of how rowdy his fans were getting. Defense countered this argument by presenting Mr. Bennett's manager, Maya Reynolds, who testified that Mr. Bennett had no knowledge of the fans' actions until it was too late. The defense's argument hinged on the idea that Mr. Bennett was isolated in his SUV and did not interact with the crowd in any meaningful way. During the grand finals of the competition, prosecution and defense passionately presented their arguments in front of the honorable Judge Lansden of the New York State Court of Appeals, who gave a verdict of not guilty.

The Verdict: NOT Guilty

Our Students

“SLI is an experience that’ll reform you as a person. The environment and the students around you create something you’ll always remember: the laughs you share, the confusion you clarify, the lunches you share with your friends, and the lessons that capture your attention. SLI is what you make out of it, and if you want to have fun and learn, it’s definitely possible, but if you decide not to socialize and separate yourself from others, it’s your choice.” - *Ariannie Rodriguez*



“What started as a kid who would find loopholes in homework and had no idea what he wanted to become, turned into a kid who wants to study law and is more proactive with his schoolwork. You do not need to want to study law, as SLI teaches more than just law. I learned time management and how to prioritize tasks to become a better student. In this program, smart kids become smarter, and good speakers become even better speakers. I now believe that I am not only prepared for high school, but also ahead of the game. SLI truly changed who I strive to become.” - *Andrew Carrillo*



Kailin Aarons
Northeastern Adventist Academy

Noah Arvelo-Reyes
IS 227 Louis Armstrong Middle School

Azeem Baksh
J.H.S. 157 Stephen A. Halsey

Brady Boodhram
P.S. 124 Osmond A Church

Andrew Carrillo
All City Leadership Secondary School

Garvens Charles
Linden Seventh-Day Adventist School

Winston Cheung
South Woods Middle School

Malia Cort
I.S. 059 Springfield Gardens

Priya Cruz-Tillery
P.S./I.S. 266Q

Noah Edwards
P.S./I.S. 270Q

Khloe Fernandez
Northeastern Adventist Academy

Torri Gaillot
P.S./I.S. 270Q

Amier Gruber
P.S./I.S. 270Q

Hailey Hu
Harry B. Thompson Middle School

Nukaeya Isaac
J.H.S. 157 Stephen A. Halsey

Samuel Jiang
BELL Academy

Emmanuel Jimenez
I.S. 061 Leonardo Da Vinci

Adrean Johnson
I.S. 059 Springfield Gardens

Rachel Jose Gonzalez
Eastampton Community School

Andrea Laljie
I.S. 059 Springfield Gardens

Alyssa Mondesir
P.S./I.S. 208

Allen Ortega
I.S. 061 Leonardo Da Vinci

William Ouedraogo
P.S./I.S. 270Q

Ariannie Rodriguez
Forte Prep Academy

Shawn Zhang
J.H.S. 157 Stephen A. Halsey

Final Thoughts & Thank You!

A **big** thank you to all supporters and sponsors who helped make Legal Outreach's Summer Law Institute happen! Over the past five weeks, our students have truly grown into young professionals ready for high school and beyond. Your support allowed these young women and men to learn not just about criminal justice but also about teamwork, confidence, and advocacy. We cannot thank you enough!

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Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP

Guest Speakers

Nana Nyantakyi, St. John's Law School and SLI Alumni
Vann Brewer and Petra Espinoza, St. John's University
Estefhani Tavarez, St. John's Law School and SLI Alumni
Ivan Almonte, Clyde & Co
Camila Morcos, Forchelli Deegan Terrana LLP
Corey Trail, Con Edison
Cesar Herrera Campos, Nassau County Peer Diversion Court
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Tanya Blocker, National Grid
Theresa Shim, Sesame Workshop
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Civil Court
Kristina Colon, Queens DA
Dean Jelani Jefferson Exum, St. John's Law School