Death penalty’s uncertain future

“The death penalty is not imposed for doing the worst crime but for having the worst lawyer,” Stephen Bright, president of the Southern Center for Human Rights, told legal experts and others gathered at the law school this fall to discuss capital punishment, and particularly lethal injection, during the 2014 Allen Chair Symposium.

Other participants at the daylong event, called “Lethal Injection, Politics, and the Future of the Death Penalty,” included former Virginia attorney general Mark Early, Fordham law professor Deborah Denno, and other leading experts.

Equally notable were speakers from outside the legal profession who brought perspectives not often included in legal symposia. Richmond Times-Dispatch reporter Frank Green used plain, factual language to describe the executions he’s witnessed during his career. The procedures, he said, “appear clinical, but there’s also a very surreal element to it. You can see the chemicals flow. The IV lines are transparent.”

Anesthesiologist Joel Zivot, director of the cardiothoracic intensive care unit at Emory Hospital in Atlanta, picked up on the theme of the clinical appearance of lethal injections, arguing that medical professionals have no proper role in executions. Referring to a photo of an inmate strapped to a gurney just before his execution, Zivot said, “This image looks like what I do in the operating room, and that offends me. Medicine hasn’t allowed itself to be impersonated, but the state is doing it anyway.”

Most-cited

Richmond Law was well-represented in a study that examined how often articles on intellectual property were cited by other authors writing in law reviews. Chris Cotropia, director of the Intellectual Property Institute, made three of the study’s lists. His article “Copying in Patent Law” was listed as the ninth most-cited article among all intellectual property articles published in 2009–13. That article and Cotropia’s “Modernizing Patent Law’s Inequitable Conduct Doctrine” ranked sixth and 18th, respectively, among patent law articles published in 2009–13.

“Risk Aversion and Rights Accretion in Intellectual Property Law,” an article by Jim Gibson, associate dean for academic affairs and the IP Institute’s founding director, was the eighth most-cited article among all intellectual property articles published from 2004–08, according to the study.

Meet the first-year class

Each year, associate dean for admissions Michelle Rahman puts together a must-read profile of the incoming class. Here are a few of the more humorous lines from her Class of 2017 edition:

• “Thought of a career as a competitive figure skater? One of you did.”
• “I am reassured, and feel safer knowing that we have in this class someone trained on explosives, interrogation, how to follow people, and how to target terrorists. At least I think I feel safer.”
• “I have never seen a class with so many who have been involved in marching bands.”
• “Nine of you have graduate degrees and eight of you are married — or were at the time you applied.”
• “You might notice some mighty big guys in your class. I believe this is the only class in my memory with so many former D1 football players. Look around — you’ll spot them.”

Read her entire piece at http://bit.ly/1wWaONy.

NEWS

Inside Gitmo

Courtroom sketch artist Janet Hamlin has practiced her art in a courtroom few attorneys will ever see: the military commissions at Guantánamo Bay. She brought that experience to Richmond Law students during a visit and an exhibit of her courtroom sketches on campus during the fall.

During a Q&A in the moot court room, she talked with Richmond Law students about the process and constraints of her work. Because cameras are not allowed in the courtroom, her sketches are the only public visual record of the proceedings there.

“Psychologically, it was very intimidating to come into the courtroom and draw somebody, a person that’s a terrorist on that level, of that magnitude,” she said during the exhibit opening. “It is a tremendous responsibility to do what a journalist would do and try to be as neutral and open as possible and let the picture tell the story.”

Hamlin, the daughter of an Air Force pilot, said the military base at Guantánamo felt strangely familiar to her. When the invitation first came, she thought she’d be making just a couple of trips to the base, but more than 27 trips later, she’s still capturing the trials.

“It’s not always easy, but it’s also a responsibility and something that’s very gratifying for me as an artist, to be able to use my abilities in such a way that makes art into a historical document,” she said.