



UNC School of Government North Carolina Judicial College

2025–26 Annual Report

Faculty and Staff Updates

WELCOME Chelsea Fuller



Chelsea joined the faculty in August 2026. She will serve as the School's expert in family law, an area that includes child custody and child support, divorce, alimony, equitable distribution, contracts between spouses, contempt, civil domestic violence protective orders, and civil no-contact orders of protection.

THANK YOU Cheryl Howell



Cheryl retired from the faculty in June 2026 after 34 years of service to the School of Government. Her work has positively impacted generations of judges and School faculty and has helped to ensure reasoned application of the law in cases affecting many North Carolina families.

By the Numbers

58

Continuing education courses offered

2,419

Participants attended programs

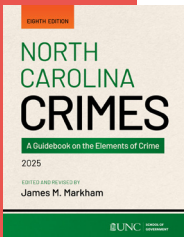
4.82

★★★★★
Average course usefulness rating

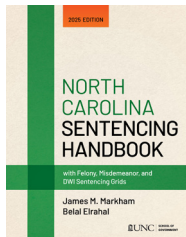
767.25

Hours of continuing education credit offered

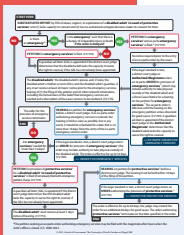
New Publications



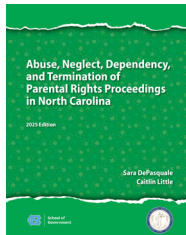
North Carolina Crimes: A Guidebook on the Elements of Crime, Eighth Edition, 2025
James M. Markham (August 2025)



North Carolina Sentencing Handbook with Felony, Misdemeanor, and DWI Sentencing Grids, 2025 Edition | James M. Markham and Belal Elrahal (December 2025)



Obtaining a Court Order for the Provision of Protective and Emergency Services for a Disabled Adult, November 2025 Edition | Meredith Smith



Abuse, Neglect, Dependency, and Termination of Parental Rights Proceedings in North Carolina, 2025 Edition | Sara DePasquale (March 2026)

BULLETINS

Capacity to Proceed in Criminal Cases in North Carolina | John Rubin (October 2025)

Iryna's Law and Pretrial Release | Brittany Bromell (March 2026)

Judicial Education Impact

Capital Case Law for Superior Court Judges

This course is designed to help judges handle capital cases efficiently and correctly. It addresses issues such as case management, jury selection, experts and discovery, and capital sentencing hearings.

"Because of the high stakes, special rules apply to capital cases that are different from regular jury trial proceedings. Presiding over one of these cases can be a daunting task to one without experience; therefore, I was very grateful for the opportunity to attend the Capital Case Law and Death Penalty Litigation course presented by the UNC School of Government. The incredibly knowledgeable professors and other exceptionally well-qualified presenters did a remarkable job giving us the information, tools, and resources we need to competently handle these cases from start to finish in a manner that comports with our solemn obligation to administer justice fairly and properly. I hope all my colleagues recognize how blessed we are to have these trainings."

—**Jason Ramey**, Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, District 22

Judicial Decision-Making for Magistrates

This course offers an intensive exploration of judicial decision-making by magistrates, including how those decisions are made, how to apply the law, and how real-life challenges impact decision-making. The focus is on improving participants' abilities to make legal decisions while identifying and guarding against improper influences.

"Professor Crenshaw is a wonderful and effective professor. She has unique experience as a teacher, magistrate, and attorney, which helps her to lead North Carolina magistrates. Her teaching helped to enhance participants' critical thinking and improve consistency in the decision-making process. Magistrates have to pull out facts and put the pieces of a puzzle together from a wad of information and then render a clear, concise, and convincing decision. Continuing to offer and expand this training through the School of Government is an investment in judicial excellence and the fair administration of justice throughout North Carolina."

—**Michelle Johnson**, Chief Magistrate, Cumberland County

Presiding Over DWI Cases: What Magistrates and District Court Judges Need to Know

The first two days of this three-day course are for magistrates and district court judges who want to learn about the physiology of alcohol and drugs, the incidence and investigation of impaired driving, and the law of impaired driving. The last day is solely for district court judges and includes a trip to the state's residential substance abuse treatment program in Goldsboro.

"I am now better prepared to preside over DWI motions and trials. Professor Elrahal is both a legal expert and a dynamic teacher."

It was enlightening to have both magistrates and district court judges together sharing their perspectives during the training. The excursion to the DART program is a must for any judge who wants to make effective treatment a part of their sentences."

—**Kendra Montgomery-Blinn**, District Court Judge, District 16



North Carolina Supreme Court Seminar for Clerks and Magistrates

This course is designed to orient magistrates and clerks to the system of justice in which they play a role. Participants learn about the history, structure, and role of the judicial, executive, and legislative branches of state government and how these roles fit into the larger system of governance. Participants attend oral arguments at the North Carolina Supreme Court and visit the North Carolina Court of Appeals, the General Assembly, and the State Archives of North Carolina.

"Although I was familiar with the workings of the judicial system, it was an incredible experience to visit places that the average person in the system rarely gets to see, such as the Court of Appeals and the Supreme



Court. The highlight of the course for me was witnessing the oral arguments at the Supreme Court. Additionally, visiting the NC Archives was fascinating, as it provided insights into the locations of some of the historic court documents. Among all the courses I've taken through the Judicial College, this one stands out as a truly memorable experience."

—Antoine Smith, Assistant Clerk of Superior Court, Northampton County

Certifications

2025–2026 Advanced Child Welfare Certification

DISTRICT COURT JUDGES

Aretha Blake

District 26

John C. Chandler

District 15

Thomas Davis

District 31

Faith Fickling-Alvarez

District 26

Sarah Lanier

District 37

Sarah McPherson

District 15

Ashleigh Parker

District 10

2025 Magistrate Certifications

CRIMINAL LAW

Deanne G. Brown

Montgomery County

Leslie M. Bruner

Scotland County

Riley Keith Curry Jr.

Davidson County

Joseph Glen Faulkner

Stanly County

Jeffrey F. Funderburk

Gaston County

Samuel C. Hardison Jr.

Martin County

Mary Sue S. Harrell

Wilson County

Ashlyn T. Harris

Cleveland County

Donnie Hedwin

New Hanover County

Howard G. Herring Jr.

Granville County

Laura B. Holden

Swain County

Jeffrey D. Hollan

Alamance County

Bryson B. Jenkins

Jones County

Caroline Mitchell

Stanly County

Shannon B. Robbins

Nash County

Helena B. Rodgers

Alamance County

Lisa S. Russell

Moore County

Heather Rose Stroud

Lenoir County

Holly Webber

Mitchell County

Alfonzia Williams

Hertford County

CIVIL LAW/SMALL CLAIMS

Angela Scott Boles

Moore County

Thomasa D. Carver

Buncombe County

Qadir Hassan

Guilford County

Howard G. Herring Jr.

Granville County

Michelle Johnson

Cumberland County

Penny Lytle

Mecklenburg County

Shavon McCants McNeill

Robeson County

Caroline Mitchell

Stanly County

John Nicholas Oliver

Robeson County

Helena B. Rodgers

Alamance County

Lisa S. Russell

Moore County

Heather Rose Stroud

Lenoir County

Holly Webber

Mitchell County

Alfonzia Williams

Hertford County



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From the Director



I knew we were busy last year—and then I saw the numbers! We offered 58 continuing education courses in fiscal year 2025–26. That is nine more than we offered the previous year. Predictably, those additional courses led to a higher overall enrollment.

We had nearly 200 more student-participants in our programs. At the same time, we maintained our high standards for instructional content, as reflected in the top-notch average course usefulness rating.

Course highlights included an inaugural *North Carolina Supreme Court Seminar for Clerks and Magistrates*, during which the group attended oral argument before the state's highest court, a course for superior court judges on presiding over capital cases, and a two-day course on impaired driving cases that included a visit to the residential substance abuse treatment program for men in Goldsboro. We also offered another two-session court leadership series, called *Getting Justice Done*, for three judicial district executive teams.

Every year, we strive to provide a robust curriculum to meet the educational needs of judicial officials at all stages of their careers, crafting offerings to

address the many facets of their work. I think this past year's offerings were a success on that front.

In addition to teaching, our faculty did a lot of writing. This year, Jamie Markham published a new edition of the School of Government bestseller, *North Carolina Crimes* (a 944-page tome on the elements of state law crimes). Sara DePasquale released a new edition of the manual for child welfare proceedings, and other faculty wrote comprehensive bulletins on topics including capacity to proceed in criminal cases and pretrial release procedures following the enactment of Iryna's Law.

All of this work is challenging, meaningful, and important, and we are privileged to be entrusted to carry it out. Thank you to the court officials we serve and our partners at the Administrative Office of the Courts for allowing us to be instructors, program planners, and expert advisors for the North Carolina Judicial Branch. We are entering the new fiscal year energized and committed to serving the state's judicial officials and other court system personnel.

Shea Riggsbee Denning

James E. Holshouser Distinguished Professor
Director, North Carolina Judicial College