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Dean's Desk: Recognizing IU Maurer alumnae who have made a difference

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Ochoa: Recognizing IU Maurer alumnae who have made a difference

March 15, 2023 | [Christiana Ochoa](#)

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DEAN'S DESK
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A couple weeks ago, I had the opportunity to welcome future law students as part of our annual Admitted Student Day. Twice each spring, usually in February and March, students who have been admitted to the Indiana University Maurer School of Law visit Bloomington to get an up-close look at our world-class law school.

Our admissions team puts on a fantastic event, complete with faculty panels, meet-and-greets with our student organizations and a chance to explore Baier Hall. After the students had a chance to grab coffee, I told them about the incredible futures they can all have as changemakers in their communities, however they define them. When the prospective students take their seats, I'm proud of what they see.

From their seats in the Kathleen and Ann DeLaney Moot Court Room, they look to the front of the room where they see the portraits of four trailblazing alumnae who have made indelible marks on the judiciary. Juanita Kidd Stout '48, Sue Shields '61, Linda Chezem '71 and Loretta Rush '83 all face out into the sea of newly admitted students who one day hope to forge paths of their own. As we celebrate Women's History Month, I wanted to recognize some of our proud past and share encouraging and inspiring news about the next generation of women attorneys.

The IU Maurer School of Law has a deep and rich history of training pioneering women in the legal field. Tamar Althouse Scholz, our first woman graduate, earned her LLB in 1892, decades before most law schools began admitting women to their incoming classes.

Stout found an interest in law while taking legal dictation for a firm in Washington, D.C., during World War II. Inspired by the work, she came to Bloomington to pursue a law degree. She established her own law practice in 1954, and was appointed just years later to the district attorney's office, earning a reputation as the "hardest working lawyer in Philadelphia," according to her New York Times obituary. She became the first woman of color to serve as a judge in Pennsylvania after her interim appointment to a municipal court in 1959. She became the first Black woman elected to any judgeship in the United States later that year, and later became the first Black woman to serve as a judge on any state supreme court.

At the age of 24, Shields ran for judge of the Hamilton County Superior Court in 1964 — just three years after graduating from law school. Her victory made her the first woman to ever be elected an Indiana general jurisdiction judge. She held that position for 14 years, until she became the first woman appointed to the Court of Appeals of Indiana. In 1994, Shields was selected to serve as U.S. magistrate judge for the Southern District of Indiana, becoming the first woman to serve as a magistrate judge in an Indiana district court.

Chezem began her career in private practice in Paoli after she graduated from Indiana Law in 1971. Within four years, Gov. Otis Bowen appointed her to serve as a judge on the Lawrence County Court, making her the first woman to serve as a county judge in the state. She made history again in 1982 when she became the first circuit court judge in the state on the Lawrence Circuit Court. Chezem served 10 years on the Court of Appeals before embarking on a new career in education. She's earned a number of awards throughout her tenure as a judge and educator, including three separate Sagamore of the Wabash awards from three different Indiana governors.

Rush spent 15 years in general practice as an associate, then partner, at a Lafayette firm before she was elected Tippecanoe Superior Court 3 judge. Rush assisted with the development of the county's court appointed special advocate program and implemented a certified juvenile drug treatment court. During her tenure as judge, she helped initiate, develop and sustain more than 25 youth programs. Rush became Indiana's 108th Supreme Court justice in 2012, and became the court's first woman chief justice two years later.

These are just four of the remarkable women who have paved new paths behind the bench. Our alumnae have done extraordinary things in academia, government, nonprofits, private practice and more. Kathleen and Ann DeLaney are two examples of such women who have provided legal services and leadership positions in organizations such as the Character and Fitness Committee for the Indiana State Board of Law Examiners and the American Law Institute, and have marshaled their formidable skills to address pressing issues in Indiana, such as domestic violence. Listing the names of all our highly recognized alumnae — let alone their achievements — would take up the next several issues of *Indiana Lawyer*.

When I looked at the wall featuring the four jurists I've mentioned in this column, I am now eager to add another portrait to our wall.

In December, Doris L. Pryor was confirmed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit, becoming the first Indiana woman of color to join the court. Her confirmation was historic — The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights called it “a long overdue moment for judicial diversity” — and will undoubtedly serve as an inspiration to a new generation of women hoping to follow in her footsteps.

Since graduating in 2003, Pryor has led a remarkable career of public service, including as U.S. magistrate judge for the Southern District of Indiana, assistant U.S. attorney for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Indiana and as national security chief for the office from 2014 to 2018.

We're proud to call Judge Pryor an alumna, one who has been deeply engaged with the school for years. Since 2015, she has taught a pretrial litigation course as part of our Wintersession each January, and in fall 2021 administered our professionalism oath to our incoming 1L class.

Many of the admitted students I speak with in the coming months will end up in Bloomington this August. At the end of their orientation, they'll rise and promise to adhere to the high standards we expect of our students.

As they recite the oath, they'll do so in the DeLaney Moot Court Room, in front of the pictures of five incredible alumnae who have already set a high standard for us all. •

Christiana Ochoa is dean, professor of law and Class of 1950 Herman B Wells endowed professor at Indiana University Maurer School of Law. Opinions expressed are those of the author.