

# Masters of Judicial Studies: Participant Profiles

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## Dennis Adjei

**Justice of The Court of Appeal**

**Judicial Service**

*Accra, Ghana, West Africa*



Justice Adjei earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Ghana, the barrister at law from Ghana School of Law, and an executive master degree in Public Administration from the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. He also holds an LLM from the University of London. He has served as justice of the Court of Appeal since 2010. He is also a senior lecturer at the Ghana School of Law and a faculty member at the Judicial Training Institute. Prior to this, he was the founder and managing partner for the Holy Trinity Chambers. Justice Adjei believes the Judicial Studies program “will have a positive impact on me as a judge and a lecturer. It will assist me to know the judicial system of the United States, and I may also impart [this knowledge] to the other judges in Ghana through the Judicial Training Institute [where I am a faculty member].”

## Robert E. Belanger

**Judge, 19th Judicial Circuit of Florida**

*Stuart, Florida*



Judge Belanger earned his bachelor's degree from John Carroll University, his JD from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law at Cleveland State University, and a Trial/Defense Counsel certification from the Naval Justice School in Rhode Island. Prior to his current role, Judge Belanger was a lawyer with the Office of the State Attorney for the 19th Judicial Circuit of Florida, and an associate attorney in a private practice. He was also a captain and judge advocate in the U.S. Marine Corps. Judge Belanger is eager to be a part of the Judicial Studies program, seeking “an opportunity to study and exchange ideas on how the judiciary can promote civility, professionalism and ethics in the legal profession.”

## Kevin A. Blazs

**Judge, Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida**

*Duval County, Florida*



Judge Blazs was appointed to Florida's Fourth Judicial Circuit Court in June 2011 and is assigned to the Criminal Division. He served on the Duval County Court from 2006 – 2011 and previously practiced with Gobelman, Love, Gavin, Blazs and Wasilenko in Jacksonville. He also has served in the U.S. Army Reserve JAG Corps, as a law professor at universities in China, an assistant state attorney for Duval County, and a legislative aide in the Michigan State Senate. After attending the U.S. Air Force Academy, he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Liberty University. Having received his JD from Thomas M. Cooley Law School, he earned a Master of Laws from the University of London and a Master of Studies from the University of Cambridge. Judge Blazs looks forward to this “opportunity to broaden [my] understanding of the interrelationship between various sources of law and to work toward a more coherent jurisprudence.” He is married to Melissa and has three children.

## **Andre M. Davis**

**Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit**

*Baltimore, Maryland*



Judge Davis holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania and his JD from the University of Maryland School of Law. Upon graduation from law school, Davis completed one-year clerkships with Judge Frank A. Kaufman in the U.S. District Court in Baltimore and Judge Francis D. Murnaghan, Jr., of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. He then served as an appellate attorney for the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and as assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Maryland. He also spent time in private practice and taught at the University of Maryland School of Law as an assistant professor. Judge Davis believes participation in the program will further his pursuit of excellence "in the ability to translate to lawyers and non-lawyers alike the importance of the work of an independent judiciary to the maintenance of our democratic ideals founded on personal liberty."

## **Marsha Erb**

**Justice, Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta**

*Calgary, Alberta, Canada*



Justice Erb has been a superior court judge in Alberta since 2001 and has since been appointed to Canada's three northern federal/territorial courts: the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut. She was admitted to the British Columbia Bar in 1984 and the Alberta Bar in 1986 and is a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan, College of Law (1983). In her final year of law school, she served as editor-in-chief of the *Saskatchewan Law Review*. A former journalist, Justice Erb was the 1977 recipient of the St. Laurent Fellowship in legal journalism (to Queen's University), a national journalism award. Prior to her appointment, Justice Erb practiced with and was a partner in a civil/commercial litigation law firm in Calgary. In early 1995, she was named general counsel to the Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee) First Nation and was involved in the development of Canada's first comprehensive aboriginal (peacemaker) justice system. Justice Erb believes the Judicial Studies program will help her "see how other institutions work and how members of the judiciary elsewhere view specialized courts."

## **Jon Ferguson**

**Judge, Superior Court of California, San Bernardino County**

*Rancho Cucamonga, California*



Judge Ferguson earned his bachelor's degree from the University of California at Riverside and his JD from the University of San Diego School of Law. He has served as supervising judge for the Rancho Cucamonga Courthouse since 2009. Prior to this, he was supervising judge for the Fontana Courthouse, presiding judge for the Appellate Division of the San Bernardino County Superior Court, and deputy district attorney for San Bernardino County. He also taught at various colleges and universities as a professor and instructor. Noting that those who serve must decide more cases and attempt to accomplish the same level of justice with fewer resources in these challenging times, Judge Ferguson believes "a focused and intensive academic study of judicial institutions from various analytical perspectives will be beneficial" to him and the court system he serves.

## **Kem Thompson Frost**

### **Justice, Court of Appeals for the 14th District of Texas**

*Houston, Texas*



Justice Frost, a native Texan, earned dual degrees in government and international business from The University of Texas and her JD from Texas Tech University School of Law. She has served as a justice since 1999; previously, she enjoyed a 15-year civil trial and appellate practice, with an emphasis on complex business litigation. Frost believes the Judicial Studies program will offer “an immensely appealing forum for examining the judiciary’s most important challenges and opportunities under the leadership of preeminent legal scholars.”

## **Eva Guzman**

### **Justice, Supreme Court of Texas**

*Cypress, Texas*



Justice Guzman holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Houston and a JD from South Texas College of Law. She has served as a Texas Supreme Court Justice since 2009. Prior to that appointment, she served as a justice for the 14th Court of Appeals of Texas and a judge for the 309th Family District Court. She practiced civil and matrimonial law for 10 years before taking the bench. Guzman is the first Latina to serve on Texas’ highest civil court. By participating in this program, she hopes to develop a better understanding of existing and emerging issues in international judicial institutions, particularly those in Latin American countries. She would also like to “examine, and perhaps develop, legal scholarship on the cultural impact and experiences of Hispanics in the American judiciary.”

## **George Hanks, Jr.**

### **U.S. Magistrate Judge, Southern District of Texas**

*Houston, Texas*



Judge Hanks is a native of Breaux Bridge, La. Prior to his appointment to the federal bench, Judge Hanks served as a justice on the Court of Appeals for the First District of Texas and as the judge of the 157th District Court in Houston. In private practice, he was a shareholder in the law firm of Wickliff & Hall, P.C., where he specialized in commercial and medical malpractice litigation. He previously worked at the law firm of Fulbright & Jaworski, L.L.P. Judge Hanks holds a bachelor’s degree in economics, *summa cum laude*, from Louisiana State University. He attended Harvard Law School where he received the Legal Defense Fund/Earl Warren Scholarship and was an editor of the *Harvard Blackletter Law Journal*. Upon graduation, he served as a law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge Sim Lake. Judge Hanks is a member of the American Law Institute, an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center, and a faculty member of the National Judicial College and National Institute for Trial Advocacy. He has served in a number of volunteer and leadership roles in the judiciary, in the legal profession, and in his community.

## **James E. Hardin, Jr.**

### **Superior Court Judge, 14th Judicial District of North Carolina**

*Durham, North Carolina*



A native of Durham, Judge Hardin earned his undergraduate degree here at Duke University. He earned his JD from Mercer University. He has served as a resident superior court judge since 2009. He is a colonel in the JAG Corps of the U.S. Army Reserve, where he serves as a military judge for the 150th Legal Support Organization in Alexandria, Va. “I understand how our justice system works, and honestly believe that I can make it better by my work and honest effort,” writes Judge Hardin. “The Duke Judicial Studies Program will allow me to enhance my skills and knowledge so that I can meet these worthy objectives.”

## Robert Hunter

### Judge, North Carolina Court of Appeals

*Raleigh, North Carolina*



Judge Hunter earned both his bachelor's degree and his JD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also spent time studying business at George Washington University. He has served as a judge since 2009. Prior to his election, he was a managing partner in a private practice, with a concentration in civil litigation, including real property, decedent's estates, securities, and election law. He was in the first class of certified mediators in North Carolina and continues his work with the court's mediation program. He has also taught at various universities. "I expect the program will be personally enriching, improve my research and writing, and assist in improving my pedagogical skills with law students," writes Judge Hunter.

## Barbara Jackson

### Associate Justice, Supreme Court of North Carolina

*Raleigh, North Carolina*



Justice Jackson earned both her bachelor's degree and her JD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She also completed her Legal Assistant's Program certificate at Meredith College in between undergraduate and law school. Prior to her current appointment, Justice Jackson served as a judge for the North Carolina Court of Appeals, general counsel for the N.C. Department of Labor, and an associate with Holt, York, McDarris LLP. She also was a contestant on JEOPARDY! years ago! After graduating from law school, she served as a law clerk at the North Carolina Supreme Court; she notes it has been interesting to return to the court as a justice. Justice Jackson says her commitment to state public service is strong. "In every decision, I have sought to apply the law faithfully," she said. Jackson believes the Judicial Studies program will help her continue to be the best jurist she can be.

## Renee Cohn Jubelirer

### Judge, Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania

*State College, Pennsylvania*



Judge Cohn Jubelirer earned her bachelor's degree from Pennsylvania State University and her JD from Northwestern University. Before being elected to the bench, she was in-house counsel for a telecommunications company and served as an elected township commissioner in South Whitehall Township, Penn. Her career includes additional public service as a deputy and assistant solicitor for Lehigh County, Penn., and an arbitrator for the Court of Common Pleas of Lehigh County. Judge Cohn Jubelirer also worked in private practice and as a law school professor.

She currently serves as the chair of the Pennsylvania Appellate Court Procedural Rules Committee. She is eager to learn "from scholars and participate in discussions with other experienced judges." She is confident the program will enhance her decision-making by placing her work in a broader perspective.

## Simone Marstiller

### Judge, Florida First District Court of Appeal

*Tallahassee, Florida*



Judge Marstiller earned her bachelor's degree from Stetson University and her JD from Stetson College of Law. When appointed to the appellate court in 2010, Judge Marstiller was serving as executive director for the Florida Elections Commission. There she oversaw the investigation and prosecution of complaints filed with the commission and was the chief administrative officer for the agency. Prior to that, she held several positions in Florida government, including associate deputy attorney general, secretary of the Department of Business and Professional Regulation, and state chief information officer. "The Judicial Studies program curriculum addresses my broad public policy interests, complements my professional experience, and, more than any other advanced degree program I have found, suggests topics I would be sufficiently interested in to write on," writes Judge Marstiller.

## Philip Pro

**Judge, U.S. District Court, District of Nevada**

*Las Vegas, Nevada*



Judge Pro earned his associate's degree from Contra Costa Community College, his bachelor's degree from San Francisco State University, and his JD from Golden Gate University School of Law. He has served as district judge since 1987. He served as chief judge for the District of Nevada from 2002 to 2007. Prior to this appointment, he served as a U.S. magistrate judge, an assistant U.S. attorney and later chief assistant U.S. attorney, and deputy attorney general in Nevada.

## Delissa Ridgway

**Judge, U.S. Court of International Trade**

*New York, New York*



Judge Ridgway holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri, where she also completed coursework for a master's in economic development. She then earned her JD from Northeastern University School of Law. For nearly 14 years, she has served as a judge of the U.S. Court of International Trade, a nine-member Article III federal trial court with exclusive nationwide jurisdiction over disputes involving the interpretation and application of U.S. customs and international trade laws. She served as chair of the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission of the United States in the first Clinton Administration, and, before that, practiced international law at Shaw Pittman (now Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman) in Washington, D.C.

## Donna Stroud

**Associate Judge, North Carolina Court of Appeals**

*Raleigh, North Carolina*



Judge Stroud earned both her bachelor's and law degrees from Campbell University. In addition to her service as judge, she is an adjunct professor of law at Campbell University. She previously served as a district court judge in Wake County, North Carolina, and she was in private practice for 16 years. She is also a certified court mediator. Judge Stroud believes that "our judicial education should continue and that we should never stop learning more about how we decide cases, how to write and express our opinions clearly and concisely, and how to improve our system of justice."

## Patricia Timmons-Goodson

**Associate Justice, Supreme Court of North Carolina**

*Raleigh, North Carolina*



Justice Timmons-Goodson earned both her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has served as an associate justice since 2006. Prior to her appointment and subsequent election, she served as a Court of Appeals judge and a District Court judge. She also served as a prosecutor in the 12th Judicial District and as staff attorney for Lumbee River Legal Services, Inc. Like her peers, she is eager to expand her knowledge through the Judicial Studies program. "As I study judicial institutions and explore the topics germane to the attainment of justice for all, this graduate-level curriculum can only make me a better jurist," said Justice Timmons-Goodson. "It is my hope that I will gain new insights into the institution to which I have devoted my professional life."