

Our Courts Arizona

Faculty Notes: Program Purpose

Thank you for serving as a faculty member for the “Our Courts Arizona” program. This program, an initiative sponsored by the Arizona Supreme Court, capitalizes on a national program that originated with Justice at Stake (an affiliate of NYU’s Brennan Center for Justice) and has since been successfully implemented in several other states.

The purpose of this program is to help provide Arizonans a basic and non-partisan understanding and appreciation of our government structures and functions, particularly our courts, the rule of law, and the vital role courts play in protecting citizens’ rights.

Lack of knowledge in these areas can lead to misperceptions, disillusionment, disengagement, and decreased public trust and confidence. Judges have a unique opportunity and obligation to help fill this knowledge gap. “Our Courts Arizona” utilizes interactive, participatory programs that engage the audience and provide basic information about the importance of fair, impartial, and accessible courts and the rule of law.

In addition to increasing awareness and support of, as well as public trust and confidence in, our judicial branch and legal system, Our Courts Arizona also aims to encourage judges to interact with the public by engaging with adult groups in their communities.

The “Our Courts Arizona” program currently features the following programs.

Fundamentals. This program addresses foundational government topics such as the separation of powers, the third branch, equal justice under the law, and the meaning and importance of fair and impartial courts.

Arizona’s Courts – How Arizona Judges Are Accountable. This program addresses judicial selection and retention methods, and the various ways by which judges are accountable.

Arizona’s Courts and How Judges Decide. This program addresses appropriate factors and structural constraints that affect how judicial decisions are made.

Rule of Law. This program focuses on defining this concept, explaining its essential principles, and emphasizing its indispensable role in our system.

Bill of Rights. This program focuses on the various rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, their importance to our everyday lives, and the role courts play in protecting these rights, using a hypothetical case of the “Scarlet Plate”.