Federal appeals court holds DU law session

One of the highest courts in the country settled in March 10 at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law for a session, giving students a chance to see judges from the United States 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in action.

And make no mistake, the judges were “in action.” Unlike trial courts where attorneys present witnesses and judges keep order and referee cases, appeals court judges take an active role in the process, peppering attorneys with questions, grilling them on their legal thought process, prodding their logic and challenging them to defend their stances.

Six cases went before the three-judge panel in rapid succession. Each side had 15 minutes to argue and to duck and weave through the judge’s barrage of questions.

When one attorney appeared to stumble over why his case deserved review from the federal appeals court, Chief Judge Mary Beck Briscoe pressed him.

“Appeals are not do-overs. You know that,” she chided.

Briscoe presided over the panel, serving with Judge Timothy M. Tymkovich and Senior Judge David M. Ebel.

Three cases heard at DU involved workplace law, one involved a doctor who lost his license to practice, and one was a complaint that police violated a person’s Constitutional rights. Another case involved a dispute of an inmate’s debt to his attorney and the attorney’s attempt to seize the inmate’s property in lieu of payment.

DU Law Dean Martin Katz sat in the front row to hear arguments.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for our students to see advocacy and professionalism at the highest level,” he said prior to the session.

“The court always looks forward to sitting at DU, and appreciates the opportunity to preside over arguments and to engage with students and faculty at the law school,” said Clerk of Court Elisabeth Shumaker. “The University is an excellent host, and the judges anticipate a great session.”

Briscoe opened the session by welcoming the dozens of law students observing. In addition, some 40 high school members of the Denver Urban Debate League attended.
“It’s always a treat,” she said. “We hope this will be a learning experience for all of you.”

According to the 10th Circuit Court website, the federal appeals courts are the intermediate courts between the district (trial) courts and the Supreme Court of the United States. There are 13 appeals courts, 11 of them are in the numbered circuits, plus there’s the District of Columbia Circuit and the Federal Circuit. The 10th Circuit includes Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. – Chase Squires for DU Today