NATIONAL CRIMINAL DEFENSE COLLEGE

ANNUAL REPORT

2025 Annual Report

Pursuing justice by empowering defenders.

40 YEARS · 1985–2025

OUR MISSION

Pursuing justice by delivering the highest standard of trial skills training, through a diverse faculty, to criminal defense attorneys across the United States, so that people accused of crimes are represented by client-centered, trial-focused, and zealous counsel.

We prepare defense counsel to recognize and confront racism and bias in the criminal legal system, and we inspire and empower a diverse community of defenders to ensure due process of law, effective assistance of counsel, freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures, and equal protection of law for all people.

OUR VISION

We envision a world in which all individuals who come in contact with the legal system are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness, regardless of wealth, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or status in any marginalized group.

ABOUT US

Founded in 1985, NCDC has trained more than 9,000 defense attorneys and is the longest-established provider of trial skills training for criminal defense practitioners in the United States. The College is led by its Deans and governed by a Board of Regents.

2025 AT A GLANCE

400+
attorneys trained

255
Trial Practice Institute graduates

5
programs, including the new Trial School

$71K
in scholarships to 29 attorneys

332
applications to the Institute

8
new faculty members

FROM THE DEAN

Deans' Reflection



Dear NCDC Community,

As the National Criminal Defense College marks 40 years of pursuing justice by empowering defenders, I am excited to share the changes that will shape our next chapter.

The biggest is a move. Our flagship program, the Deryl Dantzler Trial Practice Institute, is leaving the Hilton Fairfax in Fairfax, Virginia, for the University of Iowa College of Law in Iowa City. Returning to a college campus brings us back to our roots: law students working alongside us again, a law school partner invested in our mission, and the support of Think Iowa City, the city's convention and visitors bureau. We got a preview when we held our Cross-Examination Workshop in Iowa City this past year, and it was a tremendous success. Iowa City's central location will make the Institute easier to reach, save the College money, and give us a stronger support system to deliver an even better program for our participants.

We are also expanding our reach. Building on our 2025 Trial School in Jackson, Mississippi, NCDC is partnering with the Alabama Criminal Defense Lawyers Association on its new Alabama Criminal Defense College, developed with longtime NCDC faculty member John Lentine. This partnership has been a long time coming. We are excited to train Alabama's local faculty alongside its participants and to lay the groundwork for a program that will serve defenders there for years to come.

I am thrilled to welcome Keith Belzer as NCDC's new Assistant Executive Director. Keith has been part of the NCDC family since the 1990s and is one of our most beloved faculty members. A nationally recognized lecturer on trial techniques and strategy, he has taught defense lawyers in most of the 50 states and presented to the Israeli National Public Defender, the Puerto Rican CJA Panel, and the first regional public defender training in China. He has been named a Wisconsin Super Lawyer every year since 2005 and represented three Wisconsin Innocence Project clients who were later exonerated. You can read his full biography in the Leadership section of our website.

Keith is also helping us bring back a program many of you remember. Theory and Themes returns as Master the Courtroom: Theory, Theme, Storytelling & Performance. With his years as an actor, director and playwright, no one is better suited to lead it, and we look forward to bringing it to the NCDC community this October.

A new home for our flagship program, new partnerships, a returning program and a new leader on our team: I can't imagine a better way to celebrate 40 years. Thank you to our faculty, staff, Board of Regents, donors and alumni for making it all possible.

With gratitude,

Karen Smolar
Executive Director

2025 PROGRAMS

Five programs. One standard.

From Miami to Iowa City, online and in person, every NCDC program is taught by working trial lawyers using the College's learn-by-doing method. The Trial Practice Institute follows on the next page.

JANUARY 2025

Forensic Cross-Examination Workshop

Miami, FL · University of Miami School of Law · with the Innocence Project

60 participants

Lectures, demonstrations and breakouts built around a toolmark-evidence case problem, teaching chapters of cross that carry across forensic disciplines.

JANUARY 2025 NEW

NCDC Trial School

Jackson, MS

30 participants

A new basic trial skills program for under-resourced regions. Confidence rose from 2.76 to 4.31 out of 5 across 11 trial skills.

MARCH 20–23, 2025

Cross-Examination Workshop

Iowa City, IA · University of Iowa College of Law

55 participants

Attorneys from 23 states and Puerto Rico worked through brand-new case problems. 31% were lawyers of color.

FALL 2025

Online Cross-Examination Workshop

Virtual

20 participants

A multi-week virtual program bringing NCDC's cross-examination method to attorneys wherever they practice.

FLAGSHIP PROGRAM

Deryl Dantzler Trial Practice Institute

Two sessions in Fairfax, Virginia (June 15–28 and July 13–26), the Institute's final summer there before moving to the University of Iowa College of Law in 2026. Participants came from more than 35 states, plus Argentina, the Republic of Georgia and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

255
graduates

30%
lawyers of color

4.81
overall experience, out of 5

4.82
faculty rating, out of 5

Who we trained

Public defenders	51%
Federal defenders	24%
Private defenders	13%
Military defenders	7%
Private indigent defenders	3%
Other	2%

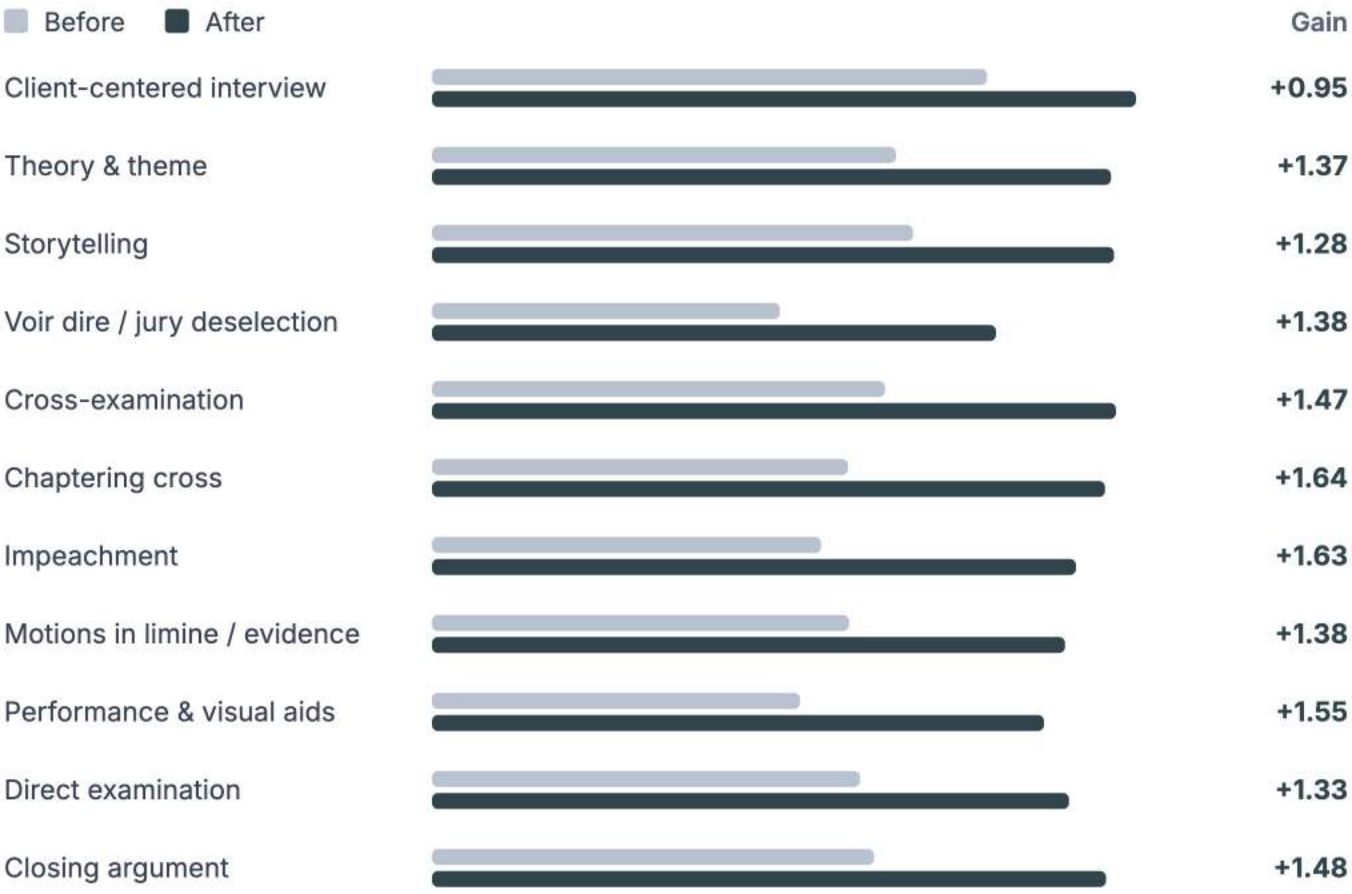
Session by session

	June	July
Participants	127	128
States represented	38	34
Lawyers of color	32%	27%
Public defenders	62	68
Federal defenders	28	33
Overall experience	4.71	4.91
Faculty rating	4.82	4.81

TRIAL PRACTICE INSTITUTE · OUTCOMES

Confidence rose in every skill we teach

Participants rated themselves on 11 trial skills before and after the Institute, on a 5-point scale. The average rose from 2.76 to 4.17, with the biggest gains in chaptering cross, impeachment, and performance and visual aids.



$4,857
given by graduates to Pay It Forward

SCHOLARSHIPS

$71,431 in scholarships

With a smaller budget after the Deryl Dantzler Scholarship Fund was drawn down in 2024 and grant support was reduced, NCDC still awarded 29 scholarships and increased support for lawyers of color from 13 to 17.

Thank you to the American College of Trial Lawyers for its continued support.

Source	2024	2025
ACTL	$35,000	**$35,000**
NACDL	$10,000	**$4,000**
Deryl Dantzler / Pay It Forward	$40,837	**$32,431**
Total	**$85,837**	**$71,431**
Scholarships awarded	34	**29**
To lawyers of color	13	**17**

WELCOME

Meet Our New Faculty

- **AA** Akin Adepoju
- **CA** Craig Albee
- **RA** Rocio Armendariz
- **RH** Ronald Hazzard
- **AH** Andrew Ho
- **LM** Leslie McNair-Jackson
- **MN** Mindy Nolan
- **DS** Daniel Gonzalez Stier

GOVERNANCE

Board of Regents

The College is governed by a Board of Regents of criminal defense attorneys from across the country.



CHAIR

Ron Tyler

Stanford, CA



VICE-CHAIR

Deja Vishny

Milwaukee, WI



SECRETARY

Paul Rudof

Northampton, MA



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Callie Glanton Steele

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Andres Guevara

Denver, CO



La Mer Kyle-Griffiths

Santa Barbara, CA



Juval Scott

Bronx, NY



Ryan Swingle

Athens, GA



LaToya Williams

Atlanta, GA

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Fiscal Year 2024–25

October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025

$871,293
total revenue

$922,769
total expenses

Where the money went



- Programs · $601,579 · 65%
- Staff & benefits · $249,779 · 27%
- Administration · $71,412 · 8%

Revenue

Source	Amount
Trial Practice Institute tuition	$530,977
Short program tuition (Cross, Forensic, Trial School, Online)	$184,890
Prior-year receivables & other	$114,028
Donations & fundraising	$34,806
Sponsorships & alumni network	$6,592
Total revenue	**$871,293**

Moving the Trial Practice Institute to Iowa City and ending participant housing is expected to save more than $60,000 a year beginning in 2026.

“The workshop far exceeded what I was expecting and I am a better defender because of the experience.”

Trial School participant, Jackson, MS

LOOKING AHEAD

2026 Programs

JAN 8–11	**Cross-Examination Workshop** San Diego, CA · University of San Diego School of Law
MAR 8–10	**Forensic Cross-Examination Workshop** Austin, TX
APR 20–24	**Alabama Criminal Defense College Kickoff** Alabama
JUNE 14–26	**Trial Practice Institute, Session I** Iowa City, IA · University of Iowa College of Law
JULY 19–31	**Trial Practice Institute, Session II** Iowa City, IA · University of Iowa College of Law
OCT 15–18	**Master the Courtroom: Theory, Theme, Storytelling & Performance** Phoenix, AZ · ASU Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law
OCT 23 – NOV 19	**Online Cross-Examination Workshop** Virtual

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Pursuing justice since 1985

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