

# American College of Trial Lawyers Doubles Down on Diversity Trial Advocacy Program

The American College of Trial Lawyers plans to host its second annual diversity trial advocacy program in May at Kirkland & Ellis in Chicago.

By Ross Todd  
February 7, 2023

Five minutes.

That's how long retired **Latham & Watkins** litigation partner **Thomas Heiden** says it took the American College of Trial Lawyers committee he chairs to decide to mount a second annual training program aimed at sharpening the courtroom skills of a diverse set of aspiring trial lawyers.

Last May we wrote about the inaugural ACTL trial diversity program, held at Latham's Chicago offices, where fellows from the college gave a free weekend of training, standup mock trial experience and feedback to 50 aspiring trial lawyers from across the country. After we heard rave reviews from faculty and participants, we offered up a pat on the back to organizers for pressing on through four COVID-related postponements to make the weekend program happen. But we also gave them a nudge to urge that the weekend not be a one-off. After all, by any measure, we're still a long way from the ACTL's stated goal of making the trial bar better reflect the diversity of society writ large.

Heiden told us he included our article alongside the direct feedback from last year's participants in the packet of material he put in front of members



Courtesy photo

Participants and faculty in a program aimed at promoting diversity in the trial bar held May 20-22, 2022 at the Chicago office of Latham & Watkins and sponsored by the American College of Trial Lawyers.

of the ACTL's teaching of trial and appellate advocacy committee, which gave quick sign-off to moving forward with the program's second edition.

"The need out there is such that we have barely scratched the tip of the iceberg," Heiden said.

This year's program, which is set to be held the first weekend of May at the Chicago office of **Kirkland & Ellis**, is currently taking nominations, and, like the inaugural edition, will be

open to 50 participants. Heiden said the college already has nominations in from lawyers as far away as Quebec and Hawaii. Although the number of nominations already is approaching capacity, organizers plan to keep a waiting list in case of any potential last-minute drop outs. On top of free training, this year the college is offering scholarships for travel and lodging for any participants who need it.

Heiden said a large percentage of the nominations already in are from lawyers who work for non-profit organizations and diverse lawyers in small firms—something he is glad to hear.

“Those people are different from associates at Latham or Kirkland, in at least two ways,” Heiden said. “One is that they’re not going to get the support from a place like Latham or Kirkland to help train them. And number two, they’re likely to be in some sort of an evidentiary or trial setting next week or the week after.”

Heiden said that there’s no shortage of potential faculty members for the program, between those that participated last year and others who have expressed interest. The college’s current president

and two past presidents have already committed to attend and teach. “This has become very popular within the college. A lot of trial owners think that this is something that it’s important for them to take three days out of their lives to participate actively,” he said.

“I think it is incumbent on people like me who have gotten so much from our civil justice system, to nurture confidence and trust and belief in the system, which I think is the best so far divined by humankind,” Heiden said.



**Thomas Heiden of  
Latham & Watkins.**