NNALSA To Name Highest Honor Received At NNALSA’s Annual Moot Court Competition, The “G. William Rice Best Oralist Award”

"We remember how hard it can be, but we have confidence in you. We are grateful for you and your brothers and sisters struggling through your training and readying yourself for the ongoing fight to preserve and advance the rights of Indian, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian people. We appreciate you, we rely on you, and we love you for your commitment to be the legal warriors standing up for the next generations of our peoples. It is comforting to know our grandchildren and great grandchildren will be well protected in the future."

- Professor G. William Rice

Professor Bill Rice’s support and love for Native American law left a lasting legacy for every passionate Native American law student. In honor of his enduring legacy, the National Native American Law Students Association will name the NNALSA’s Annual Moot Court Competition’s highest honor, the “G. William Rice Best Oralist Award.” We thank you, Professor Bill Rice. Without you and your unwavering dedication to protecting the sovereignty and rights of all Indian Nations, many of us would never be whom we are today – proud and zealous advocates for Indian Country.

G. William (Bill) Rice is an enrolled member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee in Oklahoma. Professor Bill Rice earned his B.A. in Chemistry from Philips University in Enid, Oklahoma. He earned his J.D. from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in Norman, Oklahoma. He served as the Editor, Article and Book Review Editor, and Recent Federal Developments Editor of the American Indian Law Review.

Professor Bill Rice was an avid supporter of Native American students entering and finishing law school. He often offered words of encouragement to any law student who asked for his help. He always hugged every current and former student who greeted him. His love helped many students navigate the complicated subject of Federal Indian Law, and he never failed to spend extra time with his students to ensure they understood difficult concepts. His dedication, humor, and unwavering support influenced generations of Indian law students, scholars, and lawyers to strive to be the best voice for Indian Country.

Professor Bill Rice regularly taught Indian Gaming Law, Tribal Government, Native American and Indigenous Rights, and Constitutional Law. He taught at Antioch School of Law, University of North Dakota School of Law, Cornell Law School, and the University of Tulsa College of Law. He authored the first law school level Indian Gaming casebook, Tribal Governmental Gaming Law. Professor Bill Rice successfully argued before the United States Supreme Court in Oklahoma Tax Commission v. Sac and Fox Nation. Among his many accomplishments, he served as a professor and mentor for the Pre-Law Summer Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At PLSI, Professor Rice regularly taught Federal Indian Law.
“There is no more fitting tribute to Bill Rice's brilliance as a legal advocate than bestowing the NNALSA Best Oralist award in his name,” said Hunter Cox, NNALSA President. "However, Bill Rice was not simply a great legal scholar, advocate and practitioner. He was a mentor and respected elder for many of us. His warmth eased our worries and self-doubt, and his advice helped guide us in our careers to protect our sovereign rights. Thank you for blazing a path for us, and lighting our way. We are proud to carry on the torch of tribal sovereignty."

NNALSA reached out to former PLSI graduates, NNALSA members, and students of Professor Bill Rice and asked if they would tell us a personal memory of him. NNALSA would like to share with you some of the memories we received. Every person that we reached out to shared so much because Professor Bill Rice had that big of an impact on their lives. As important, and precious as these memories are, NNALSA had no choice but to edit them. Here’s what some NNALSA members had to say:

“There are only a handful of people you meet in your lifetime that make a profound, positive impact in your life; that leave you knowing that you will forever be a better person for having met them; Professor G. William Rice was exactly that…I was fortunate to meet Bill in 2012, at the Pre-Law Summer Institute… Bill would often say with his comforting smile, ‘I see you have your Indian BDUs,’ referring to our quote briefcases… Every time I grab my quote briefcase, I smile, and remember Bill for his guidance, his teaching, and his nurturing ways… Bill always knew what to say, whom to say it to, how to say it, and when to say it. Sometimes he understood that no words were needed, merely a smile. It is precisely these personal skills, combined with hard work, late nights and long hours, that made Bill one of the all-time great oral advocates for Indians… This is why I am so happy NNALSA’s Annual Moot Court Competition award for “Best Oralist” will be named in honor of Professor G. William Rice… what made Bill a great advocate, and why he was able to argue so eloquently, so successfully, was his roll up your sleeves and work hard attitude. ‘We have to work harder and smarter as Indians. Nothing will be given to us, and we have to fight like warriors, because it’s not going to be easy,’ he would tell us… Bill will forever be a guiding star for us in Indian country, and no matter how dark the night may be, if you work hard enough, you will see Bill’s smile and know you are on the right path. His legacy will guide those of us that knew him and help us to lead generations of future warriors.”

- Stephen M. Raslich, MSU College of Law 2015/PLSI Graduate 2012/NNALSA Member

“Professor Bill Rice was one of the smartest people I have ever known… he took his obligations as a professor, responsible for teaching the next generation of Indian advocates not just the intricacies of the law itself, but also the necessary tools to succeed in the practice of law… for me personally, [this] began… with a cold call [during class]… while grilling me on a particularly confusing section of a case, Professor Rice stopped, stroked his chin, and asked the class if anyone had a different interpretation of the passage… Professor Rice turned back to me and asked if I had been convinced to change my mind. I told him that I had not, and he congratulated me… He told us that this was a lesson about sticking to your guns… [he said] if you do not have the guts to stand behind your position when you know you are right, all of your skills and intelligence are meaningless… I do not know if I would have the courage to stand up for myself at this stage in my career if I had not happened to take a class with Professor Bill Rice that summer. He was an amazing professor and mentor, and his lessons will live on in the many students whose lives he changed… It is my hope that we can all find strength in his example and find the courage to believe in ourselves the way that he believed in us.”

- Tommy Miller, Harvard Law School 2015/PLSI Graduate 2012/NNALSA Member

“Professor Rice was an inspiration from the time I met him onward… I will fondly recall telling him about my academic successes; he looked pleased and overjoyed and hugged me emphatically when I approached him. Professor Rice taught me to think harder, observe silently, and to choose the actions that make me proud, instead of hesitating in the name of insecurity; he taught me that any voice spoken in truth is a voice worthy of listening to. It was an honor to have learned from him.”

- Amy Foerster, MSU College of Law/PLSI Graduate 2012/NNALSA Member
NNALSA extends our sincerest condolences and prayers to the entire Rice family, and friends, during this difficult time. Our heart pours out to Professor Bill Rice’s Daughter, Karen Rice. She is one of our own. Karen is currently serving as NNALSA’s Area 8 Representative.