

TOUCHING THE FUTURE

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS



Eileen Beltz, CRI

College of Court Reporting

Beltz has been instructing since the late 1990s after working as a reporter on and off. She says: "When I took an evening teaching position at the Academy of Court Reporting, I fell in love with teaching. And I realized I could talk really fast, which helps!"



Robyn Hennigan, RPR, CRI

Clark State College/Stark State College joint court reporting program

Hennigan has been running the program at Clark State College for a little more than 20 years. Before running the program, she worked as a freelance reporter and an official, and she continued to work as a captioner and scopist while simultaneously teaching as an adjunct in the Clark State College court reporting program. Throughout her career, she has been active in both NCRA and her state organization.



Mary Beth Johnson, CRI

Community College of Allegheny County

Johnson has taught court reporting for 46 years and currently works at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) in Pittsburgh, Pa. CCAC offers an online certificate and degree court reporting program, with classes conducted through Zoom for live, interactive education.



Patti Ziegler, Ed.D., CRI, CPE

Des Moines Area Community College

Ziegler started the court reporting program at the Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) in 2014 and has worked there for the past 8 years. Over the past 25 years, she has also taught at the Stenotype Institute of South Dakota, Sioux Falls, S.D.; AIB College of Business, Des Moines, Iowa; and the St. Louis Community College-Meramec, Kirkwood, Mo. She earned her doctorate in Educational Leadership from University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis in 2005. Her doctoral dissertation was titled *From 0 to 225 — A Game of Chutes and Ladders: The Student Experience in a Court Reporting Program*.

When looking at the future of a profession, who would have a better handle on it than the teachers of tomorrow's court reporters and captioners. We reached out to four past CASE Award of Excellence winners to see what they think about the latest crop of students and the overall prospects of the profession.

JCR | When you look at the current student body at your school, what are your impressions?

HENNIGAN | When I look at our current student body, I see some very intelligent and dedicated individuals who are aspiring to be professionals in the reporting field. They are a small, mighty group who are working hard to achieve their dreams! My only wish is that the program had triple or even quadruple the number of students. That has always been the real challenge ... getting students in the program.

JOHNSON | Earnest individuals trying to learn the theory of writing on a steno machine while raising a family, working at a full-time job, assisting their parents, and focusing on the goal of becoming a court reporter. Our students are hard-working and dedicated. They want to develop a skill that will enable them to earn a family-sustaining wage.

ZIEGLER | The students at DMACC-Newton are similar to students at other colleges where I've taught. We have a mix of ages: Some high school graduates, some with a degree from another college, some who are changing careers in their 40s and beyond. Most students are surprised at the amount of practice and focus that is required and the level of GRIT/resilience they will need!

BELTZ | We have so many fantastic students! I love the enthusiasm they show when we discuss the possibilities awaiting them today. There is a lot of pressure too, though, as we are trying to impress on them the importance of them getting out and working to enhance the profession. They understand how greatly they are needed, and they are working hard to be professionals in the field.

JCR | What do you like about teaching?

HENNIGAN | I love watching students learn and grow. When the students succeed, it brings so much joy knowing that they have the skills to be excellent reporters and find success in this awesome career!

JOHNSON | Teaching the steno alphabet, watching students who never placed their hands on a steno machine acquire a unique skill, placing graduates, and keeping in touch with individuals who have completed our program. Our graduates are guest speakers, and it is so meaningful to hear the words of a person who has completed court reporting training encouraging new students. I love Monday mornings, because I send a text to all of our theory students with an emoji encouraging their success.

ZIEGLER | I love meeting the students and watching them move through the program. It is so rewarding to teach theory and see when the "light bulb" comes on!

BELTZ | I love hyping the students up! I remember attending my first conference when I was a student in Columbus, Ohio. I left there feeling amazing, and I started practicing as soon as I got home. I try to recreate a small portion of that when I can. There is no feeling like when a student finally passes that test that has been eluding them for so long. I absolutely love being able to share a little bit of that joy with them!

JCR | What do you think makes a good court reporting and captioning instructor?

HENNIGAN | A good instructor must be upfront as well as encouraging with the students, meaning the instructor must tell the students about the required

work and dedication necessary of the students to succeed, but he/she must also explain to the students that he/she will be the facilitator of the students' successes, providing tools, support, and encouragement throughout the path of the students' journeys. The instructor needs to be knowledgeable of all facets of the professions, have a support system of professionals who share their expertise and help keep the program cutting edge, and be available and reachable for students so that students feel the support they need to succeed.

JOHNSON | A person who is dedicated to their craft, loves teaching and learning, is current with technology, and is good at answering questions at all hours of the day and night. Teaching virtually has turned teachers into help desk facilitators.

ZIEGLER | I think good reporting/captioning instructors take a personal interest in their students and care about their success. A good instructor goes beyond teaching the curriculum and incorporates ways to help students stay engaged and motivated.

BELTZ | Try to remember that feeling of defeat that court reporting students feel daily. They get knocked down over and over again, and they have to jump back up and go back for more. Encourage them that they are worth it. They are so resilient. When they get down and are upset about a fail, pump them up about how far they have come. Remind them that the reward is there if they just put in the work. Share their successes with them.

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JCR | Do you feel that your program and students had to make a lot of changes in the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

HENNIGAN | Our program was already a completely online program, so the program itself didn't have to make too many changes. Students, however, had to deal with many changes in their own lives to find success in school. For example, many students have children; and those children's schools immediately maneuvered to online, meaning parents who were students themselves now had to create routines for themselves and their children to allow both to be successful in their learning.

JOHNSON | We started our first online court reporting program in January of 2020. For those students, they were prepared for remote learning. Students who began their training prior to the pandemic signed up for in-class instruction. Many did not have strong internet signals, a reliable computer, or the desire to learn at home. Our faculty became "all in" and developed teaching methodologies almost overnight to facilitate remote learning. We dictated and uploaded thousands of takes and practice materials, learned to grade on Blackboard, supported each other, and worked as a team to deliver the highest quality online education possible, all the while learning, refining, evaluating, and examining our program and its delivery methods. We organized breakout rooms, offered tutoring and extra practice sessions, and developed a new paradigm of teaching court reporting. I would like to thank Barb Douglas; Barbara Lightcap, RDR, CRI; Jill Martin; and Jill Oliver for their countless hours of refining the way they taught to a new platform. Without the dedicated faculty members at CCAC, the students who started online and those who transitioned online would not have achieved their speed requirements. Six of the January 2020 students graduated in less than two years, and all were placed prior to graduation.

ZIEGLER | Our program made huge changes due to COVID-19. While we already had online courses, we transitioned to all synchronous/virtual classes in March 2020. All theory tests were converted to accommodate virtual instruction. We began using Realtime Coach for all speed tests. Starting fall 2023, our program will be fully virtual, with synchronous classes. We believe the structured nature of synchronous classes will help our students make progress, similar to our face-to-face program. Students will come to campus once a month for testing and for community-building.

Most of our students found the transition to online (synchronous) to be beneficial since they were no longer required to commute to campus. Students do miss the face-to-face interaction, but they have found ways to interact via social media.

BELTZ | There have been so many obstacles because of COVID-19, and the students were not exempt from that. They dealt with being sick themselves to caring for sick family members. The whole process of taking down the record was changing, and they were adapting to the expectations. I think that anybody who was in any school during COVID-19 will come out stronger because of it. They have had to evolve and think outside the box to make things happen.

JCR | As a past recipient of the CASE Award of Excellence, do you have any suggestions for others who are teaching tomorrow's court reporters and captioners?

HENNIGAN | I will try to keep advice short for an article; however, there are so many directions that advice can flow. I would, first, advise any professor to stay linked to the court reporters, captioners, and CART writers who are willing to have the professor be in their professional family to allow for a support system for keeping teaching current. I also highly recommend being involved in professional organizations: NCRA and state/local organizations. Relationships are so very important, not only with the students, but with the professionals to help keep the "circle of life" in this profession on the cutting edge. Relationship building with students is imperative with the professor, but students' relationships with professionals also need to be facilitated by the professor so that students can begin engraining themselves in the professional family of reporters across the country. The student/professional relationship allows the student to have a mentor (or many) outside of school who he/she can receive support, tips, tricks, and encouragement from as well as model.

Testing is another area that we, as professors of reporting, must focus on helping students change their views of. All professional reporters know that while in school, you fail more tests than you pass; but when you pass, you *got it!* It's extremely difficult for students to grasp the thought of failing over and over again. I try to help the students change their perspective on testing from the first speed test they take. I encourage them to view all speed tests as opportunities for measuring progress rather than viewing them as tests. If a student can see the testing as chances given to measure growth, even if they don't achieve the required 95 percent accuracy, then they can see that their day-to-day skill-building practice efforts are paying off. I encourage students to always review their graded "opportunities" to see the feedback and allow for directed practice. This allows the students to stay more positive about seeing more failed tests than passed tests – I mean, opportunities!

JOHNSON | We approach relationship building through Zoom meetings, contests to encourage students to practice more, texts with positive emojis, and caring about each student individually. Our faculty notices if a person is practicing and if they are not. We contact students by phone, text, and email, and reach out with our comments and suggestions.

ZIEGLER | The best suggestion I can provide to teachers is to be ready for constant change! It's so important to be flexible as the environment and technology evolve. Students 25 years ago handed in paper notes for homework; today's students submit electronic homework. Testing has gone electronic. Almost nothing is the same as it was when I started teaching! One way to stay abreast of the changes is to attend NCRA seminars and workshops. Watch for "Best Practices" suggestions from other instructors. Network and learn from others.

BELTZ | I really believe that empathy is a big part of educating. Every one of our students has a different story to tell. We never know what somebody has going on at home. Try to be understanding while stressing the importance of deadlines and thoroughness required in this profession. There has to be a balance. Be 100 percent committed to someone who is doing everything they can to be successful and do whatever you can to help them attain their goal.

The best suggestion I can provide to teachers is to be ready for constant change!

JCR | How do you keep students motivated?

HENNIGAN | Keeping students motivated in any setting is certainly a challenge, but keeping students motivated in an online setting brings some additional challenges. I try to create many different modes of student-to-student interaction so that the students know they are not on an island by themselves and can create relationships with individuals who are building this skill with them. I also have many tools for communication with me and other instructors available to allow students to communicate with us using their most comfortable method: i.e., email, texting, live meetings, phone apps, video chat, discussion postings, etc.

Celebration is always a huge motivator for students; so, with every passed test, our instructors do a small celebratory gesture using at least one of the public program communication tools as well as one or more of the private student communication tools. The small celebration affirms the students' successes and assures them that we (the instructors) are proud of them, pushing them toward their next goal.

JOHNSON | By being motivated and positive, offering one-on-one Zoom meetings, individual tutoring, and countless emails and texts encouraging their success, suggesting practice tools, and constantly evaluating their progress.

ZIEGLER | On the first day of theory class, I ask students to write down their “compelling reasons” for wanting to be a court reporter. As the year goes on, we refer to that often. I also like to dictate at very slow speeds to remind students of how far they’ve come. I encourage students to challenge themselves and keep track of their small successes (writing a list of briefs or phrases faster than yesterday, achieving one percent higher than the last time, etc). I also remind students that they are learning a unique skill and going into a very interesting profession. Guest speakers and field trips help to reinforce and build motivation.

BELTZ | I believe in the speedbuilding process, and I stress it to them. They can be successful if they put the work into it. I try to pump them up about jumping on the machine and working through a drill or a speedbuilding session. The feeling that you get when you master a phrase or a word that has been tripping you up is magical! They have the opportunity to feel that way every day.

We embrace the future; we do not consider that we will be replaced. Technology is our friend. Complacency is our enemy.

JCR | How do you keep yourself motivated (and upbeat)?

HENNIGAN | I start every day with an amazing God, and I have a very supportive husband and a loving family, as well as many friends. I am truly blessed!

JOHNSON | I cook. Trying a new recipe is similar to learning to become a court reporter. The first time you attempt a new concoction you read the directions scrupulously. After you have prepared the dish several times, you have the steps memorized. The same is true with learning theory. The fifth time you write “collection” you hear the KSHUN ending.

ZIEGLER | One way that I stay motivated is to reflect on graduates who are now working as court report-

ers. That is so rewarding. I remind myself that even if students withdraw from the program, they can be ambassadors for the profession. We are fortunate as teachers to touch students’ lives on a daily basis and build relationships with them. As VP/academic dean, I told my teachers, “Students won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” I still believe that! Showing compassion and concern for students can be as important as teaching them these new skills.

BELTZ | I just love what I do. I have so many wonderful friends in the reporting community who I admire so much. If I can help someone succeed in their dreams and help this profession at the same time, that’s so rewarding.

JCR | What do you find you tell students over and over again?

HENNIGAN | I seem to tell the students over and over again that it takes time, hard work, dedication, and determination to build a skill. Reporting is a skill, and only you can do the work to achieve the skill. I will provide the tools, support, and encouragement.

JOHNSON | Practice. Particularly now, with major league football players going to training camp, I use the analogy that these men started in midget football; at training camp they are refining the skills of running faster and throwing and catching the ball with greater speed and accuracy. In court reporting we practice the same skills, but we do not get paid millions of dollars.

ZIEGLER | Starting in theory, I tell students to “trust the process.” Learning this skill and writing at 225 wpm is a process. It doesn’t happen without many hours of practice. The process does work if they work the process!

BELTZ | They are just words. You are stronger than words. Don’t let them beat you. You can do this!

JCR | What do you think that mentors and those who hire court reporters and captioners upon graduation should know?

HENNIGAN | I believe those who hire court reporters and captioners need to be aware of the efforts that have been made to bring students into the profession, and I believe their joining in on the efforts to recruit students will benefit them as well as schools and the entire profession. There are many partnership opportunities with colleges to assist employers with getting qualified employees, and court reporting and captioning employers should reach out to the

NCRA-approved schools and begin partnering to help themselves fill the open positions, the schools recruit students, and the profession strengthen.

Mentors need to know that students today have many life struggles on top of their going to school, and the students need extra encouragement.

JOHNSON | That completing court reporting training is the beginning of the journey. Be patient, encouraging, and remember when you first started.

ZIEGLER | Today's students have not necessarily had the same K-12 educational background that was available in the 70s and 80s (or prior). Students today are generally more casual and less rule-oriented. Since the court system is still quite conservative/traditional, it's important that we help new reporters find a comfort zone, so they succeed while still fitting in with the culture of court reporting.

BELTZ | To the mentors and employers: We appreciate you! I am so thankful the professionals who take our students under their wings; we couldn't do it without them. We have taught them a lot, but they will learn so much their first few years when they are out there.

We must work together to think outside the box on how to accomplish a massive recruiting effort.

JCR | What do you think the future of the court reporting and captioning professions looks like?

HENNIGAN | Like everyone in this profession, from reporters and captioners to instructors and scopists, I am worried about the future of the profession simply because of supply-and-demand issues. The demand is great, but the supply of new graduates is not. We must really focus on getting the word out about the fabulous career opportunities in this profession as well as to change the mindset of the public that it's a dying career or a clerical-type of career. The skill needs to be highlighted as an elite skill in an IT profession, and the recruitment of students must take the forefront. Lack of students has been an issue for far too long. Recruiting students looks much different today than it did many years ago. We must work together to think outside the box on how to accomplish a massive recruiting effort.

JOHNSON | I have always been an optimistic person. We embrace the future; we do not consider that we will be replaced. Technology is our friend. Complacency is our enemy.

ZIEGLER | I think that the future of court reporting and captioning will continue to evolve. It's important that we continue to explain the many benefits/rewards of court reporting to prospective students and the public at large so that we can fill the numerous positions that are currently open.

BELTZ | It will be interesting to see how our community evolves. I am not sure what the future holds, but I know that today's students are getting ready to meet the challenges!

JCR | How do you recruit students to your programs?

HENNIGAN | We recruit students via word-of-mouth, NCRA A to Z® programs, NCRA DiscoverSteno® leads, and an occasional press release and/or social media advertisement. Being a community college, we don't receive much funding in the marketing/advertising budget for our program; so we must always get creative and think outside the box and take advantage of some of the tools that NCRA provides: NCRA A to Z and NCRA DiscoverSteno, for example.

JOHNSON | The marketing department developed an e-blast that we send to all prospective students, we send out press releases about our basic training classes, the web page of CCAC has featured our program, we use social media posts, and word of mouth. Many of our students heard of our program from their aunt's hairdresser's third cousin who knew a court reporter.

ZIEGLER | Iowa court reporters take an active role in talking about their profession and helping to recruit students. They provide scholarships to new and returning students. The NCRA A to Z program has become another way to spread the word about court reporting. We are trying to include attorneys and judges in talking about the importance of court reporters in the judicial system.

BELTZ | Our recruitment efforts include word of mouth from graduates and current students, our website, high school career day visits, booth at the NCRA Conference, and our NCRA A to Z program.