Professor Debbie Badonsky taught at Sinclair Community College for 35 years, from 1978 to 2013. Debbie Badonsky was hired by Department Chair Garnett McDonough to assist in creating the first paralegal program in the Miami Valley (then called “Legal Assisting”). Hiring Debbie turned out to be an outstanding choice. First, Debbie developed the all-important Introduction to Legal Assisting course as well as Research and Writing courses and the Litigation courses. These core classes set the stage for the goals and expectation for all paralegal students then and now.

While the department chair was instrumental in developing and strongly supported the legal assisting program, Debbie was the sole full-time legal assisting professor who taught required legal assisting courses, along with a few part time instructors. Thus, for many years, in addition to the core courses, listed above, she also taught nearly every required course in the curriculum. A monumental task considering she often had five difficult preps a quarter. As the program grew, American Bar Association approval of the program was sought and, at last, in 1989 a second full-time faculty member was hired.

Thirty years ago the paralegal/legal assisting profession was just starting to be recognized. Debbie began using internships as a method to help attorneys realize the benefits, for the firm and for the clients, of hiring paralegals. Thanks to Debbie’s hard work, lawyers in the Miami Valley legal community soon recognized the excellence of the Sinclair Legal Assisting program. Sinclair graduates were, and continue to be, in demand.

Debbie loves the law and she imparted that love to students. She had high standards and students knew meeting those standards would benefit them. Her courses were demanding, but those who completed the work knew they were prepared to be successful in the legal profession. Due to her diligent work, Debbie developed excellent courses, but she never, ever, thought her work was done. She continually, year after year, worked to improve the courses she taught.

Debbie’s desire to constantly improve led to her discovery of a new way of teaching called “Process Learning.” She teamed with Dr. Sue Merrell-Daley to find a way to use this method of teaching to improve student learning. In fact, these two innovators developed a new learning environment in the entire college. They held one day seminars, three day seminars, and individual one-on-one session for all college faculty members, not just those in the
paralegal department. This student-centered, critical thinking way of teaching became the model for teaching across the college.

In addition to the core curriculum courses, Debbie worked with other faculty to first develop an important Legal Ethics course, and then to expand that class into one of the first hybrid classes. She worked to improve her technology skills, not just for the Ethics class, but incorporated the use of technology into all of her courses.

She quickly became a key player in the development of the Paralegal Program’s “Law Office of the Future” when the department was awarded a grant in the, then new, Center for Interactive Learning. Working with other department faculty, she was instrumental in helping to create a law office environment which included the use of computers, phones, copiers and fax machines. She also incorporated the use of a paralegal/technology graduate to assist with teaching legal software and added Technology Resources as a co-requirement to the Introduction to Paralegal course. Thus, she ensured that paralegal graduates would have the required technology, as well as the legal knowledge, to be successful paralegals.

Debbie excelled at teaching, and to complement her teaching, she added the team teacher concept in the Spring of 1985. She realized that having a graduate assistant in the classroom would provide students’ knowledge of how a working paralegal applied what they were learning in the classroom. Thus, “team-teaching” began with the Litigation II course, and expanded into other substantive law classes soon after.

Debbie’s efforts did not go unnoticed. For her many achievements in improving student learning she received awards for meritorious teaching year after year. Debbie was named Innovator of the Year in 1998 for her process learning efforts and in 1997 she received the NISOD Teaching and Excellence Award.

When Debbie joined the Paralegal Program, after several years of practice with the Legal Aid Society of Dayton as a staff attorney, she said she first thought she would be at Sinclair for a few years. The college, the paralegal program, and the legal community are fortunate that she found a home at Sinclair. For all her successful endeavors, she certainly deserves to be awarded Professor Emeritus status.

Debbie’s efforts in teaching alone would entitle her to join the ranks of those named professor emeritus, but she also made many important contributions to the college and to her colleagues. She aided in faculty governance by serving as a division senator as well as senate secretary culminating in her election as Faculty President. She served on the Mutual Gains team, the faculty and administrative team that worked to come to consensus on wages, and benefits. She was a strong advocate for faculty, while remaining professional at all times. And, due to her love of the law and justice she served for many years on the Grievance Committee. Other contributions included serving on the Division Merit Committee, and leading seminars, including Fall Conference.

During Debbie’s time at Sinclair her innovation, professionalism, and hard work made her appointment to Professor Emeritus a foregone conclusion.