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An Enduring Tradition: The INADR International Law School Mediation Tournament in Chicago

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Peace Building at Principia

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President's Corner: Ana Khurtsidze Begins Her Term as President of INADR

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2026



An Enduring Tradition: The INADR International Law School Mediation Tournament in Chicago

Tamar Ketsbaia

page 3



Peace Building at Principia

Agatha Nakalembe & Serena Hidalgo

page 6



IIMT Moves South! A 2026 IIMT Tournament Recap

Christy Foley

page 9



President's Corner: Ana Khurtsidze Begins Her Term as President of INADR

page 11





In Memoriam: Jeff Steele & John Williams

pages 13-14



Upcoming Tournaments

page 15

TAMAR KETSBAIA



An Enduring Tradition: The INADR International Law School Mediation Tournament in Chicago

Every other year, Chicago serves as the traditional host of INADR's flagship event, making last spring's tournament a homecoming to a city that has played an important role in the organization's history. The 24th Annual International Law School Mediation Tournament, held March 4-7, 2026, was hosted by Loyola University Chicago School of Law, whose dedication and careful planning created an outstanding setting for the competition.

Chicago once again became a meeting place for students, coaches, and legal experts from around the world. The tournament proudly hosted 28 teams and a wide range of distinguished law schools from the United States, Greece, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, India, Ireland, and Singapore.

Much of the tournament's success was made possible by Professor Teresa Frisbie, J.D., and her team. Their thoughtful organization ensured that every stage of the event ran smoothly. Participants, judges, coaches, and guests were welcomed into an environment that combined academic excellence with genuine hospitality. Over several days, the law school's classrooms and hallways became spaces for thoughtful advocacy, strategic negotiation, and meaningful professional exchange.

The Heartbeat of the INADR Family

Organizing an international event of this scale requires months of preparation and close coordination across institutions and time zones. However, no challenge is impossible when the processes are coordinated by Dr. Mary Lou Frank in her role as Head of the ILSMT Committee. Her unique ability to navigate any difficult situation with a gentle smile and grace is the core element that makes this tournament magical, transforming every stressful moment into an unforgettable experience.

She was supported steadily by then-President Professor Ken Frank, J.D., and then-President elect Ana Khurtsidze, Dean of the Law School at the University of Georgia (UG). Their leadership, together with the invaluable contributions of colleagues across the INADR network, truly reflected the collaborative effort and international spirit of the organization.

Behind the Scenes: The Tabulation Countdown

One of the most memorable parts of this year's tournament took place away from the competition rooms as I had the privilege of serving on the tournament's Tabulation Committee. Working side by side with our highly esteemed then-President Professor Frank was an experience I will carry with me forever.

There is an unforgettable energy to those final moments of a tournament. Collecting and processing the ballots alongside Professor Frank felt exactly like a New Year's Eve countdown—a high-stakes, thrilling rush of adrenaline accompanied by the metaphorical fireworks of seeing the final results click into place. The time spent collaborating with him was invaluable. His steady professionalism, great humor, endless patience, and profound humanity left a lasting impression on me, and his example will undoubtedly guide me in all the tournaments to come and throughout my own professional journey.

An Esteemed Bench of Legal Experts

An INADR tournament cannot thrive without the dedication of its panel, and this year's bench of legal professionals and mediation experts was exceptional. The judges ran each round with the utmost professionalism, eager to provide high-level feedback to the next generation of practitioners. They became deeply invested in the process, remaining highly intrigued by the evolving dynamics of the rounds and genuinely captivated by the final results.

A Truly Global Field of Competitors

Organizing a truly global event is uniquely complex in today's challenging international environment. Geopolitical and logistical hurdles unfortunately forced several last-minute physical withdrawals. True to the spirit of dispute resolution, however, these setbacks did not break our connections; teams unable to travel remained highly engaged from afar, while on the ground, we witnessed the inspiring creation of spontaneous, hybrid student teams who adapted beautifully and even, in several cases, earned well-deserved awards.

Celebrating Excellence: The Winners

To reach the final field, competitors navigated an intensive training session, three preliminary rounds of live mediation, high-stakes semi-finals, and the ultimate final round. While the heart of INADR remains rooted in education and connection, we are thrilled to celebrate the outstanding talent that emerged at the top:



Ken Frank, past INADR President, training judges in Chicago.
Photo credit: John Lag

· **Best Mediator Team**: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, whose preparation, professionalism, and consistency distinguished them throughout the competition.
· **Best Advocate/Client Team**: National University of Singapore, who left a lasting impression with their strategic advocacy and outstanding teamwork.
· **Top Advocate/Client Pair**: Jacee Espinoza and Sebastian Chisari (University of Illinois Chicago School of Law), whose communication and coordination stood out during the rounds.
· **Top Mediator**: Enzo Escalante (Penn State Dickinson Law - University Park), who commanded the rounds with an exceptionally balanced, clear, and perceptive approach.
· **Special Recognitions: The H. Case Ellis Award for Team Spirit** went to American University Washington College of Law, while Sneha Kamada (Fordham University School of Law) was honored with the **Dr. Mary Lou Frank Award for Reflective Practice**.

Looking Ahead

Whether leaving with a trophy or a global network of new friends, every participant contributed to another successful chapter in the history of INADR. Through this shared commitment, the INADR community continues to grow, adapt, and inspire future generations of peacemakers.



Isabella Castillo (left), Coach and participant, Boston University, Morenike Obifarinde (center), Nigeria, INADR Board Member, and Teresa Frisbee (right), INADR Vice President.
Photo credit: John Lag

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Want to see more?

Visit www.inadr.org/peacemaker-publication/ and stay up to date on our past and upcoming Peacemaker Annual editions.

AGATHA NAKALEMBE
SERENA HIDALGO
C'29, Mediation Co-Captains

PEACE BUILDING AT PRINCIPIA



Photo credit: David Weis

How Mediation Found Its Home at Principia

Mediation did not arrive at Principia College through a committee decision or a strategic initiative. It arrived through one man's conviction. Dr. Jeff Steele, also known as El Jefe to everyone who knew him. He introduced the program around 2012, at a time when alternative dispute resolution was still finding its footing in undergraduate education. Dr. Steele understood something about human conflict that no legal textbook could fully teach: Most disputes are not really about facts but rather are about whether people feel heard.

Steele came to Principia as what the college then called a multidisciplinary faculty. He was never housed in a single department, splitting his time across English, Theater, and wherever else the college needed him. But as Professor of Political Science and fellow coach John Williams recalls, Steele found his truest home with the Mediation team.

Under his leadership, Principia won over a hundred trophies and awards through INADR competition. The results were truly remarkable by any measure.

He was named INADR Coach of the Year in 2016. The program's highest achievement came in Bologna, Italy, where Principia took first place in team mediation at the international law school competition. These were not accomplishments of a program finding its feet. They were the accomplishments of a program that had been built, deliberately and lovingly, by someone who believed in what it stood for.

What made the program distinctive was not just its competitive record, but the culture Steele created within it. Students were not recruited through formal channels, but rather drawn to the atmosphere. Sebastian, a former team member and previous team captain, was brought into the program by the former team captain. What he found was not what he expected from a competitive academic team.

“He was really fun to be around,” Sebastian said of Steele. “He was the life of the party kind of guy. He always made us laugh and had a way of commanding everyone in the room.”

Rather than arriving with a rigid plan, Steele would open by simply asking: “Let’s just talk about the last round, or something else you want to work on.”

It was, in its own quiet way, mediation in practice, began by listening then building from there.

When Steele passed, the program did not collapse. It endured, because he had built it to outlast himself. (See Jeff Steele In Memoriam on Page 13).

The El Jefe Mediation Tournament
On April 10th and 11th 2026, Principia College hosted the El Jefe Mediation Tournament— named in honor of the coach who started it all. It was the name everyone already used for him, the one that stuck across nearly a decade of tournaments, late night comedy shows, and riffing sessions with fellow coaches in hotel lobbies from Toronto to Chicago to Orlando. Naming the tournament “El Jefe” was the most natural thing in the world.

The tournament drew competitors from the University of Central Florida, Grace College, The University of Texas at Dallas, filling Principia’s campus with the particular energy that mediation competitions produce. Where mock trial rooms crackle with cross-examination and objection, mediation rooms hum with something harder to name: the effort of two sides trying, genuinely, to understand each other.

John William, who has judged and coached across both formats, has seen the confusion that arises when students cross between them. A skilled mock trial advocate, he recalls, once walked into a mediation round and began firing cross examination questions at the opposing party. “She was really smart, really good, absolutely skilled, but in the wrong room,” John Williams said.

For the students who competed and organized, the weekend carried meaning beyond the scorecards. Sebastian, reflecting on the event, was measured but optimistic. “It was great,” he said.

“I think it went well. We’ll be better set up to do another one in the future.”



GParticipants at the El Jefe Mediation Tournament.
Photo credit: David Weis

The forward-looking instinct, to learn from the experience and build toward the next one, is itself a kind of mediation thinking. You assess what happened, you identify what could be better, and move towards a resolution.

For coaches like Tony Seagroves of UT Dallas, attending the tournament at Principia a second time brought its own weight. The first visit was when Steele himself was at the helm.

This time, the chair at the front of the room belonged to someone else. John Williams carried the program forward, though he was candid that his approach differed from his predecessor's. (See John Williams In Memoriam on Page 14.)



University of Texas, Dallas Coach Tony Seagroves discussing tips with participants and collegues.
Photo credit: David Weis

"My style is a little different, a little more assertive," he said.

What remains unchanged is the program's commitment to the principles Steele embedded in it: patience, empathy, and the belief that two parties in conflict almost always have more in common than they realize.

As Seagroves put it, speaking to students: "If we're able to look at things three different ways, I think we'll be better citizens, and neighbors, and friends, and family."

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In Memoriam

Visit pages 13 and 14 to learn more about Jeff Steele and John Williams.

CHRISTY FOLEY

IIMT MOVES SOUTH! A 2026 IIMT TOURNAMENT RECAP



The IIMT was hosted by the University of Central Florida on Feb. 6-8, 2026. It took place at the University's downtown Orlando campus. In total, there were 18 teams competing (with 10 separate schools represented). Teams came from as far as Singapore to attend the tournament! The tournament started with three hours of learning sessions (which focused on INADR trivia, successful advocacy in mediation, and successful mediation techniques).

The tournament had three preliminary rounds, a semi-finals round, and a finals round. The tournament concluded with a banquet in a ballroom at the Crowne Plaza Orlando-Downtown, which was sponsored in part by the mediation firm Upchurch Watson White & Max. Overall, the students seemed to really enjoy the tournament and connect with each other!



INADR Board Member and UCF Coach Christy Foley celebrating both teams' awards.
Photo credit: Samuel Schiller



UCF Mediation Team preparing for their first round of mediations.
Photo credit: Christy Foley

2026 IIMT Award Recipients

Top Mediator Teams

1. Boston University
2. Boston University
3. College of the Holy Cross
4. University of Central Florida
5. University of Texas – Dallas
6. Principia College
7. Maharishi International University
8. University of Texas – Dallas
9. National University of Singapore
10. Grace College



Top Advocate/Client Teams

1. College of the Holy Cross
2. University of Texas – Dallas
3. University of Central Florida
4. University of Central Florida
5. Maharishi International University
6. Boston University
7. NOVA Southeastern University
8. College of the Holy Cross & University of Central Florida
9. NOVA Southeastern University
10. National University of Singapore

Top Individual Mediators

1. Isabella Castillo, Boston University
2. Sam Woody, College of the Holy Cross
3. Leslie Schulting, University of Central Florida
4. Sining Guo, Boston University
5. Shaun Chore, Principia College
6. Colin Hollingsead, University of Texas – Dallas
7. Sheila Chen, Boston University
8. Santiago Guerra Mantilla, University of Central Florida
9. Carly Hanifin, College of the Holy Cross
10. Tamela Allen, University of Central Florida

Top Advocate/Client Pairs

1. Feryal Saqib & Kailey Babulal, University of Texas – Dallas
2. Henry Meiser & Kelly Lombardo, College of the Holy Cross
3. Sarah Yarger & Leslie Schulting, University of Central Florida
4. Justice Rowell & Anushka Desai, University of Central Florida
5. Leslie Schulting & Santiago Guerra Mantilla, University of Central Florida
6. Kozbie Lamb & Caresse Rodriguez, Maharishi International University
7. Isabella Castillo & Anna Davis, Boston University
8. Alyssa Heinze & Mya Aly, NOVA Southeastern University
9. Kozbie Lamb & Polo Altynski-Ross, Maharishi International University
10. Kailey Babulal & Arousha Moavenzadeh Ghaznavi, University of Texas – Dallas

President's Corner: Ana Khurtsidze Begins Her Term as President of INADR



The International Academy of Dispute Resolution is pleased to announce that Ana Khurtsidze has begun her term as President of INADR, following her election as President elect two years ago.

Ana is a Georgian legal scholar, mediator, trainer, and academic leader with extensive experience in alternative dispute resolution, legal education, institutional development, and international cooperation. She serves as Dean of the School of Law at the University of Georgia, where she has played a leading role in modernizing legal education and expanding opportunities for students to develop practical skills in mediation and negotiation.

Ana succeeds Ken Frank, who served as President from 2024 to 2026. INADR expresses its deep appreciation to Ken for his dedicated leadership, long-standing service, and significant contribution to the Academy and its international community.

Ana has been actively engaged with INADR for many years. Before beginning her presidential term, she served as Vice President for Education and subsequently as President elect. In these roles, she contributed to the Academy's educational strategy, international outreach, professional standards, and student mediation initiatives. She also has extensive experience participating in international mediation and negotiation competitions and has supported the development of future generations of dispute-resolution professionals.

Beyond INADR, Ana serves on the United Nations Global Mediation Panel and contributes to international initiatives focused on mediation, access to justice, and institutional development. She is the founder of the Alternative Dispute Resolution East-European Centre, an accredited organization providing professional mediator training, and the founder and president of the Gnomon Wise research institute. Her work brings together academic leadership, mediation practice, research, training, and legal reform.

As President, Ana will work with INADR's Board, members, universities, professionals, and international partners to strengthen the Academy's global community. Her priorities include expanding educational opportunities, developing cooperation with universities and dispute resolution institutions, supporting high-quality mediation tournaments, strengthening professional and ethical standards, and making INADR's activities accessible to a broader international audience.

“Beyond INADR, Ana serves on the United Nations Global Mediation Panel and contributes to international initiatives focused on mediation, access to justice, and institutional development.”

INADR is also pleased to welcome Vicktoria Harriot as its new President elect. Her appointment ensures continuity in the Academy’s leadership and reflects INADR’s commitment to building a strong and forward-looking international organization.

The beginning of Ana’s presidential term marks an exciting new chapter for INADR. Her experience, energy, and commitment to dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution will support the Academy as it continues its mission of educating, connecting, and inspiring the next generation of peacemakers.

The INADR community congratulates Ana Khurtsidze as she begins her term as President and warmly welcomes Vicktoria Harriott to her new role as President elect.



President Ana Khurtsidze addressing participants at INADR’s 2025 conference in Tbilisi, Georgia.
Photo credit: Merab Galashvili

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Who makes up INADR?

Visit page 17 to view all INADR officers, past presidents, board members, fellows, and interns!

In Memoriam



JEFF STEELE
2016 INADR Coach of the Year
Principia College Mediation Team Coach

Dr. Jeff Steele, PhD, was Professor Emeritus of Theatre at Principia College in Illinois.

Jeff shared his wide-ranging and immense wealth of knowledge with passion and enthusiasm, blessing students and colleagues with his love of life and learning. His expertise in Shakespeare, theatre history and literature, acting, film studies, English and American literature, and speech was shared as a multi-disciplinary faculty member at Principia College, as he taught across a range of disciplines.

He established and served as Head Coach for the Principia College Mediation Team, bringing home many trophies from national and international competitions. He was chosen as “Coach of the Year” in 2016 by the International Academy of Dispute Resolution. Students thrived under his coaching, leadership, and mentorship.

Dr. Steele made a substantial impact on the Principia and INADR community and is remembered with great love and affection by colleagues, students, fellow church members, and those he befriended in the larger community. Jeff embraced those he met with curiosity, enthusiasm, and love, easily making friends with everyone he met.

Please click here to learn more about Jeff Steele.

In Memoriam



JOHN WILLIAMS
Principia College
Mediation Team Coach

John Williams was born in Germany and grew up in a military family where he developed a great love of travel and a deep respect for diverse cultures. During his youth, he lived in Virginia, New Delhi, India, California, and Bangkok, Thailand.

John graduated from Principia College in Illinois, and later earned a Juris Doctor from George Washington University. His first job was as an attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, grounding his career in a strong commitment to justice, civil rights, and service.

John returned to Principia College in 1983, where he dedicated more than 40 years as a professor of mass communication and political science, shaping generations of students. Known for both his intellectual rigor and his sense of humor, John took a personal and genuine interest in his students, ensuring that each felt seen and heard, valued, and supported. Grounded in a global perspective with a commitment to character education, he encouraged students to think critically, engage meaningfully in civic life, and lead with integrity and moral courage.

After serving as Interim President of Principia College in 2019, John was appointed College President, a position he held through 2023 before returning to the classroom and the students he cared so deeply about.

Please click here to learn more about John Williams.

CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR UPDATES

Join us at one of our next tournaments

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LAW SCHOOL

ASIA

November 25-28, 2026: Navi Mumbai, India: International Law School Mediation Tournament, DY Patil University School of Law

EUROPE

March 4-7, 2027: Pyla, Larnaca, Cyprus: 25th INADR International Law School Mediation Tournament, University of Central Lancashire (UCLan Cyprus)

Want to host a tournament?

No prior experience necessary!
Send us an email so we can connect with you and spread peacemaking for generations to come!

inadrconnect@gmail.com

CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR UPDATES

Join us at one of our next tournaments

INADR

UNDERGRADUATE

NORTH AMERICA

November 5-7, 2026: Gainesville, GA, USA: 27th Annual International Intercollegiate Mediation Tournament, Brenau University

Want to host a tournament?

No prior experience necessary!
Send us an email so we can connect with you and spread peacemaking for generations to come!

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