The Appellate Clinic is designed to hone the basic skills of a lawyer—analysis of legal issues and careful, persuasive writing—in a real case where clients are counting on you. This case offered a wonderful opportunity to do just that.

Owsley and clinic student Ami Galani, JD ’04, attended the Supreme Court oral arguments on March 1, 2004. “It was very rewarding to be there when I was so completely invested in the issue,” Owsley says. “You’re biting your tongue as the attorneys go through it because you’ve got such strong opinions of your own, and, of course, it’s fascinating to see where the lead counsel takes it.”

In its May 17, 2004, opinion, the Supreme Court decided against the state, ruling that a bankruptcy court’s discharge of a student debt does not implicate a state’s sovereign immunity. Although the court did not reach the question on which certiorari was granted, La Pierre says his students’ ability to “tackle a constitutional issue at the appellate level was a tremendous learning experience.”

This fall students are working on Eighth Circuit cases. The clerk of the court, Michael Gans, JD ’77, assigns cases to the clinic and teaches appellate procedure. Lee Marshall, JD ’99, an attorney with Bryan Cave and an adjunct professor at the School of Law, is supervising clinic students; he clerked at the Eighth Circuit.

La Pierre is pleased that these attorneys will help students transfer their knowledge of the law from theory to action. “By working directly with these talented alumni, the students will find that appellate practice—if done well—can be a very rewarding, intellectual experience.”