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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Career-ready, analytical thinkers are created in educational settings that use a *community of inquiry* approach. The best learning outcomes result from professor/student, student/student, and university/community engagements. The higher education experience must offer students and professors an ongoing chance to learn from each other, while at the same time improving the community in which the university is located.

Community of Inquiry

My classroom approach derives from my experiences in music and in the practice of law. In both settings, one person alone cannot develop and deliver the end-goals or the methods that achieve them. For example, in music ensembles, even with all participants and the conductor sharing identical notes on a page, expression and interpretation relies on experimentation and a mutual learning experience. The same is true in law. Parties and attorneys in a case rarely disagree as to the facts, but it is the collective presentation and interpretation of those facts that persuades a juror, judge, or the opposing side. Through cooperative techniques, case parties and attorneys, can form new insights and new considerations that will help prevent problems and protracted litigation. The practice of law is a collaborative, teaching profession, and so should be the law classroom.

Professors and students should collaborate in the classroom, using the same set of knowledge and facts contained in text books, cases, or research, in a joint venture for new realizations and policy considerations. The professor whose approach is to only serve as a fountain of facts or theory, from which students absorb information to regurgitate on exams, fails zir students, zirsself, and the legal industry. The university community thrives from active engagement between professors and students.

The community of inquiry approach creates graduates who are ready to analyze and think independently but with a willingness to share and receive colleagues' ideas and criticism. For the professor, the philosophy fosters professional growth and development of new concepts for research, writing, and curricular evolution, whereas ego-focused lecture alone fosters stagnation.

Developing Practice-Ready Professionals

For undergraduate legal studies programs, there are generally two types of students: those who aspire to attend law school and those who intend to work as paralegals. Legal studies program should serve both. Both paths require the same skills and knowledge; it is simply that law schools ask the future attorney to acquire a deeper level of analysis and to carry a heavier burden with stricter regulatory obligations upon graduation from law school.

Yet, the undergraduate paralegal student should not be made to feel lesser than her future law student classmate. The legal community must abandon the idea that paralegals are mere secretaries and help prospective paralegals realize the importance of strong writing and research. Just as we want nurse practitioners to be as well-studied about medication as their supervising doctors, paralegals must be as knowledgeable as an attorney about, for example, the elements of a tort. Though change to these ends must arise from undergraduate programs, law schools must help young lawyers to model strong professionalism for their future subordinates. Whether with employees or clients, attorneys must be able and willing to teach in the office. Thus, opportunities for team collaboration in law schools and public speaking events should be an essential piece of the law curriculum, beyond 1L mock trial/moot court presentations.

Employing the community of inquiry philosophy to develop practice-ready legal minds, whether paralegal or attorney, requires community engagement. Undergraduate legal studies programs and law schools must help students access the local bar association and other law societies so that they and their professors are aware of current trends and needs in law practice. This is important for university statistics because students who are well-informed and who have realistic expectations about legal employment will be outstanding employees, and the legal community in which the university sits will be held in greater esteem, resulting in further engagement, programs, and fiscal sponsorships. Wherever I teach, collaboration with local law practice leaders will be an essential piece of my curriculum design.

Pedagogical Approaches and Assessment

My classroom techniques encompass universal design for learning and the concepts of spaced repetition and interleaving. I teach these concepts and other study skills early in the first semester, and I motivate students to realize that every day during law school should be viewed as preparation for the bar exam. I offer students a variety of ways to access materials and concepts. My

lectures usually include multi-media items, on-the-spot reading, classroom discussion, and in-class exercises. The order and extent to which I use any one method depends on the topic and the length of the class.

Typically, my class sessions open with a lecture to reiterate prior discussions and to introduce a topic, and then, with case studies or real-practice examples, students work in groups for discussion. Class sessions end with a preview for the next session and a writing assignment, whether for in-class or homework. Because today's students have developed in a mostly digital lifestyle, it is inevitable that the Socratic Method will continue to lose prominence, as techniques to accommodate visual learners and universal design become the norm. Thus, visual classroom elements are a necessity, such as diagrams, informatics, flow-charts, and video clips. Such materials should enhance the lecture, not stand-in-place of the lecture.

Of the various methods, the writing assignments are, perhaps, the most important. Law is a writing and teaching profession. Every law class must develop and demand high-quality writing that communicates to a wide audience. Any lesser expectation diminishes future opportunities for the student and harms the university's reputation. Unfortunately, the past decade has shown a steep decline in writing skills among entering freshmen and first-year law students, and it is imperative that law programs implement a consistent writing approach across all classes, including early introduction of bar exam essay writing. As a member of the Legal Writing Institute, I often hear colleagues worry about the quality of writing coming out of undergraduate programs. I think the blame is probably misplaced, as the problem begins in elementary schools. My top priority, wherever and whatever I may teach, is to ensure that my students and the university that I represent are never among those schools from which law professors and employers dread to see graduates.

I recognize that any class brings a variety of learners. Matching my goal towards universal design for learning during class sessions, my assessments make the same effort. For example, written exams consist of multiple choice, true/false, short-answer, and essay, rather than only one type of question format. I am experimenting with oral and visual feedback options. However, assessment is more than mere grading of an exam, which only measures a student's performance on one, random day. Assessment, even if ungraded, is a part of every class via discussion and group work, allowing for adjustments as my shortcomings or incompatibility with a particular class may become apparent. Flexibility on my part provides every student the opportunity to succeed, even if they failed to understand the material under a given presentation style.

For writing assignments, with the exception of a legal writing course, I do not grade grammar. However, I make a point to correct grammar for every student on every assignment, including short-answer exam responses. This labor-intensive feedback results in obvious student improvement over the course of the semester, and it is very rewarding to see such tangible progress. The same developments can be made clear to a student with the maintenance of a writing portfolio that deposits work product from each course for an annual review with the student's advisor. Many of my students have commented that my extensive feedback on writing assignments has helped them realize recurring grammar and vocabulary mistakes and that they are better writers than when a semester began.

The Legal Studies Community

My passion for teaching is student-focused. I do not teach for the ego boost of lecturing to a crowd or to have my name in scholarly journals. I teach because I want to help develop professionals with exceptional skills and a humanistic point of view. These traits are necessities in the legal profession. Shaping minds for a positive and compassionate outlook requires genuine, empathetic concern for students as individuals, not as products. The proof that I live-up to that self-imposed standard is in my "always open door" policy, including between semesters and after graduation. I want to help students find their own voices and philosophies, and I want all of my students to feel comfortable enough to consult with me outside the classroom. I seek a place among a faculty team that has similar ideas, whether undergraduate or law school, and that has a sense of camaraderie between students and faculty. Such a combination benefits professors and students - both always learning from each other in a community of inquiry.