

JOSHUA AARON JONES

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Career-ready, analytical thinkers are created in educational settings that use a *Community of Inquiry* approach incorporating teaching, social, and cognitive presences rooted in positive psychology. 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. Through multiple means of representation and other universal design techniques, I fully engage each student from where they are.

Communities of Inquiry and Positive Psychology Build Strong Professionals

My classroom approach derives from my experiences in music and in law practice. In either setting, one person alone cannot develop and deliver methods that reach the end-goals. 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. The practice of law is a collaborative profession, and so should be the law classroom.

With positive education and communal learning, I collaborate with students, focused on individualized needs to the greatest extent possible. 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 their students, themselves, and the legal industry. With intentional planning that finds as many cross points of positive psychology, the community of inquiry, and universal design, I develop long-term relationships with students and often continue as a mentor long after a class has concluded.

The Community of Inquiry approach produces lawyers 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.

Positive education in a community of inquiry supports professional identity formation for confidence, mental well-being, and ethical behavior.

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 environment, the Socratic Method will continue to lose prominence, as techniques to accommodate visual learners 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 profession. Every law class must develop and demand high-quality writing. 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 and law students, and law schools must implement a consistent writing approach across all classes, including early introduction of bar exam essay writing. 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.

Recognizing 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 recognize assessment as more than mere grading, 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. 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.

Intentionality for Community Outcomes

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. 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 collegial faculty team that has similar ideas about student-centered learning and that has a sense of camaraderie between students and faculty. Such a combination benefits professors and students - both always learning from each other.