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How to Incorporate External Activities Into Courses for Your Students' Benefit

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I. INTRODUCTION: CLASSROOM SETTING FOR INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES

Each semester, in my legal document preparation course, I tell my students to imagine that the classroom is a legal work environment and they have just begun working as my paralegals/legal assistants. Their grade for this course is based on a series of drafting assignments and a final memo. Thus, they are to approach each assignment with the understanding that I (the professor) am the attorney/employer and they (the students) are the paralegals/employees.

I have always required the students in this course to submit a portfolio of their work product at the end of the semester. This year I have taken it a step further by requiring an electronic portfolio better known as the e-portfolio. Since many of my students are computer savvy, this technology-enhanced addition to the course has caught on with great enthusiasm.

In my writing or critical thinking assignments for my constitutional law course, I generally tell my students to imagine that they are clerking for one of the Supreme Court Justices. This semester I am conducting a lecture in a courtroom so that the students can experience first hand a view from the bench.

II. INCORPORATING LAW RELATED AND OTHER COLLEGE ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Since I, as well as many other paralegal educators, spend so much of my out of classroom time doing

law related work as well as college related work, I began thinking about ways my students could become aware of these activities and more directly benefit from them. Thus, I have, started to weave through my courses the knowledge and skills I have gained through attendance at law seminars/workshops, pro bono work, and college committee work, just to name a few. The information is presented to the students during lectures that lend themselves to this kind of information.

A. COMMITTEE WORK AND STUDENTS:

In my document preparation course, for example, during my discussion of resume building and creation, I mention that being a member of and holding an executive office in a club, College organization, etc. could assist the student when looking for employment. How so?, most will question. I then explain that it is pertinent information that can be placed on a resume and also provides a worthwhile topic of discussion during an interview with a potential employer. The student is then much more attentive to and agreeable with the suggestion of becoming more involved in the College. In that case, both the College and the student are beneficiaries.

I then mention to the students that the more involved they become in organizations and committee work, the more they will be able to find out about other opportunities and networking possibilities. For example, I tell them about how I helped develop and plan a community-based conference hosted at my College regarding youth and violence. One of the many positive aspects of my participation in this conference, was that I was able to meet with Counsel to the Brooklyn Borough President and was informed that I could use their courtroom for one of my class lectures. (This lecture is

slated to take place on Nov. 13). My hope is that my students will gain a different perspective about the role of a judge when they are actually seated at the bench and are rendering their decision on a matter. The view from the bench and the responsibility that comes with the territory of being a judge, I hope, are just some of what they will have gained from this exercise.

Moreover, the students who immerse themselves in College committee work where administrators, deans, faculty, etc. are also members, may get to better know their college leaders and what they do for the students and the College community. In fact, when students call upon professors to write letters of recommendation, or to be a listed reference for them, the student will again benefit. The professor will associate a student with more than a grade and class participation, but have first hand knowledge of the student's leadership skills and abilities. Another bonus, is that the student learns the value of being involved in one's community and giving back.

B. VOLUNTEER PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICES:

It is during the course of the semester when I announce to students that it is advisement time and they are to meet with their respective academic advisors regarding courses to select for the upcoming semester, that I introduce the concept of pro bono activities. I mention that prior to the student enrolling in their internship course, the student would be better served if they volunteer their time in one of the many legal clinics our department and its professors are involved in. This serves several purposes for the student. First, the student gains confidence in his or her ability to deal with clients, attorneys and other legal professionals, in advance of his or

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her internship course, when they will be working in a legal environment. Secondly, the student gains paralegal work experience with real life clients and the preparation of legal documents for actual cases. The student can recite this on their resume as volunteer paralegal experience. If a student has had no prior legal work experience, this gets the legal work experience started on his or her resume in advance of graduation from College. The student is, therefore, gaining both book knowledge and work experience, which makes him or her more marketable to employers. Further, the students are learning how to deal with legal forms/paperwork, scheduling, clients and court personnel, and well in advance of working for an attorney or firm or government agency. It is truly a win-win situation for the student that requires time, but allows the student to demonstrate their

enthusiasm and dedication to his or her chosen profession.

C. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINARS:

Many of the bar association mandatory continuing legal education courses etc., speak for themselves in terms of the knowledge gained from them and their usefulness in the classroom. One particular favorite tool that I learned about and will be using this semester as a final project in my Constitutional Law course, is to have the class be contributing editors for a classbook/compilation of some critical thinking exercise. The students will also act as the reviewers, designers, etc. It is similar in concept to what we do as educators when we author or publish articles/books. I am hopeful that they will experience the same sense of accomplishment and pride. It will also be useful for me as a demonstration model for future classes.

III. CONCLUSION

The exposure of our students to, not only the nuts and bolts knowledge of paralegal work, but also the passion and devotion of the dedicated legal professionals whom they are and will be devoting so much of their time and commitment to and with, is an essential asset to the well-rounded and well prepared future paralegal.



* I have been a paralegal educator since 1994. Upon graduating from law school, I clerked for a federal bankruptcy court judge and then later worked as an associate in two major New York law firms. While working as an associate, I had the pleasure of training and working with many great paralegals. In addition, I worked as a paralegal during college and prior to entering law school. I am also the mother of three boys James, JonPaul and Justin.

Encryption *continued from page 13*

“at every peril to [myself]”) the confidences and secrets of my client.

Okay. We’re all on board with that, but then came technology. Those of you who are my contemporaries (does the IBM Selectric ring a bell?) might remember when fax machines made their appearance big time in the law office. For some time we scrambled around and wrung our hands in worry about the confidential communicate that accidentally gets faxed to the opposing counsel. We wrote long and legalistic confidentiality warnings and plastered them on all of our cover sheets. We asked our ethics committees for opinions. They opined: “Uh oh!” We wrung (or is that wrang?) some more. After a time, the ABA and most state bar associations allowed as the appropriate thing for the Evil Receiver to do is not read the fax (yeah, right) and return it to the

Negligent Sender. The hand wringing ended but we remain alert and double check that fax number before pushing “send”.

Then it was cell phones whose air wave transmissions can be snatched out of the air and routed to The Dark Side. You know what? Sometimes there are Bad People out there doing bad stuff. It is just as likely that the Bad Lawyers will wiretap your office as hire someone to follow you around and listen in on your cell phone calls. For that matter, with long range listening devices no doubt available through Hammaker Schlemmer, we could listen in ourselves. Again, however, the Bar at large determined that the convenience of technology and the fact that it really does help us represent our clients more efficiently outweighed the benefits of banning cellular confidential communications. And then there was email....

Okay. Here it is: Sometimes we do

stupid stuff. Take the associate who inadvertently left a box of highly confidential documents in an airport parking lot. More recently, the prosecution in the Kobe Bryant case accidentally gave a file folder to the defense opening the door to an attack on the alleged victim’s prior sexual activity. (It didn’t take long for the law-related television dramas to pick up on that one!) So, anyway, inadvertent disclosure happens. But no one has ever suggested that we write our legal documents in code, have they? It has not seriously been considered an option to encrypt our interoffice memos, has it?

So, Bonnie, once again you have given me pause and caused me sleepless nights with your ethics pop quiz, but this time I am confident that I don’t have to run home and learn the encryption protocol for my PDA — even presuming I can find the damned thing. I probably left it in the ladies room after that last deposition... ✦