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Kathryn Thompson's Post

Lifelong Learning is Key to Successful Lawyering

Posted by Kathryn Thompson on 03/02/2015 at 09:40 AM



Excellent lawyers are committed to lifelong learning;

our craft requires it. Whenever a new client walks into a lawyer's office, that lawyer faces a new challenge. This challenge always includes new facts to learn, and a new problem to solve. This problem may add a new wrinkle to a familiar area of law, or may require the lawyer to become familiar with an entirely new area of law, or both.

Training students to learn the skills needed to represent these future clients, and to confidently embrace the unique challenge that each client's problem raises, is at the heart of everything we do at RWU Law, including our academic support services. This training begins before students enter their first year and continues until graduation.

Before first year orientation, we run a program known as **Jump Start**. This week-long, prelaw preparation course is designed to teach students to read and analyze cases, introduce them to the Socratic method, and help them develop clear, precise, and logical communication skills. The program finishes with a mock exam, which tests students' ability to effectively and accurately apply the legal doctrine they have learned during the week to a new client's situation. In addition to enjoying an introduction to the academic rigors of law school, Jump Start students are treated to lunch in Bristol with law school staff and former Jump Start students -- who often serve as mentors in the coming year. One of the highlights of the week is a tour of the Rhode Island Supreme Court followed by a meal with law school alumnus currently working in Providence. My favorite part of the program is witnessing the students form bonds of friendship and support that follow them through law school.



Once school begins, all first year students attend an **Academic Success Orientation** session where they are introduced to the professionals in the Academic Success program, and interact with a panel of upper level students who discuss the law school experience with them. During the fall semester, **Professor Kim Baker (our writing specialist)** and I teach a series of workshops for 1Ls on case reading and briefing, outlining, written communication, note-taking and exam-writing. In practice, lawyers work and learn collaboratively, which is why during these sessions we encourage students to work together and also introduce them to our Academic Success Teaching Fellows. The teaching fellows are self-reflective learners who are innovative in their approach to teaching and learning; moreover, each is committed to facilitating an atmosphere of collaborative learning and support throughout the law school.

During the spring semester, I teach a weekly course known as **Spring Excel**. The course is open to any 1L student who wishes to improve exam-taking, legal writing or other skills. This course is particularly important for students whose first-semester performance on exams does not reflect their potential or the level of effort they committed to law school.

While classroom time and workshops are beneficial to students' learning, it's the one-on-one work with a student that I find most beneficial to a student's long-term success. During one-on-one sessions with students, Professor Baker, **Professor Ralston (the Associate Director of Bar Support)** and I work closely with students, helping them to resolve the specific challenges they are facing and develop a plan to overcome these obstacles.

Students learn early in their legal education that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to a client's problems; I've learned the same is true for our academic support services. Each of our law students is a unique individual who comes to our school with a different background, life situation, professional goal, skill-set, and personality. In the Academic Success Program we see this diversity as an opportunity to create programs which embrace all types of learners, and which ultimately enable our students to capitalize on their uniqueness in order to be creative and dynamic advocates for their future clients.