

THE CARE AND APPRECIATION OF ADJUNCT FACULTY

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THE lawyers, judges and government officials who serve as members of the adjunct faculty at our law schools fulfill a number of important roles. Many bring expertise in practice specialties not covered by full time faculty and can provide up-to-date practice tips for our students. They also serve as role models and examples of responsible lawyers giving back to society through their teaching. Their efforts can open doors to job opportunities for students and graduates and their input can help insure that the law school's programs and curriculum remain relevant to modern law practice. For law schools with evening classes, they play a particularly important role in expanding the reach of the curriculum. As members of the law school community, they can also be important to the school's efforts to build its reputation and enlist governmental and financial support.

This essay will describe efforts at the Widener University School of Law to build on our history of strong support from the bench and bar through adjunct teaching. With campuses in Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, and Wilmington, Delaware, the "corporate capital" of our nation, we have been blessed with exceptional support. Our teachers include or have included Senator Joseph Biden, former FBI Director and former federal judge Louis Freeh, Delaware Supreme Court Justices Randy Holland, Jack Jacobs and Joseph Walsh, Chancellor William Chandler of the Delaware Chancery Court and Justice Thomas Saylor of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. We value their contributions as well as the contributions of all the other distinguished members of the bench and bar who teach for us. The essay will describe our programs for selecting, orienting, training and reviewing adjunct faculty as well as programs recently instituted to thank these important people for what they do.

I. RECRUITING AND SELECTION

Recruiting adjunct faculty from the highest levels of the judiciary, bar and government is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a law school dean. The dean's role at bar meetings, court conferences and other official events gives him or her access to a wide range of talented people. Many become friends.

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Sometimes, a recruitment can arise out of a chance conversation and expression of interest. In other cases, the recruitment is intentional. Whether a particular recruitment is immediately successful or not, however, the effort is a no-lose proposition. People are flattered to be asked to be part of legal education. The meeting is, at the very least, an opportunity to share positive developments at the school and the first step toward making another friend for the school.

A more sensitive issue is how to deal with the dozens of lawyers and judges who express an interest in teaching as an adjunct professor. Sometimes, there is no opportunity in the interested person's area of expertise. In other cases, the person may not be a good fit, another good person may already occupy the slot, or you may not know enough about the person to be willing to put that person before a regular class. The issue is sensitive because, handled poorly, it can cost the school the support of a potentially valuable friend. I have found it helpful to make the vice deans, who oversee the academic programs on both our campuses, responsible for the selection and scheduling of adjuncts. It also helps to have a faculty committee involved in adjunct faculty matters. That way, I can thank the interested persons for their interest and be helpful by referring their applications to the appropriate place. For people we cannot fit into our adjunct faculty at that time, I like to find ways for them to become more involved. Some will be willing to volunteer time as a moot court or trial advocacy coach or judge, a judge in our legal methods appellate advocacy program, a mentor in our mentoring program or a volunteer trainer in our Intensive Trial Advocacy Program. Many will find this satisfying and rewarding. Some will show such promise in these roles that we will then want to recruit them for the adjunct faculty.

II. ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

Although they are outstanding lawyers and jurists, most new members of the adjunct faculty are not trained or experienced law school teachers. It may have been many years since they were last in a law school classroom. When they were, they may have been exposed to good or not so good teaching. As deans and faculty members, we need to ensure that adjunct professors meet student expectations for teaching quality, faculty expectations for content, coverage and workload and administrative expectations for compliance with grading, academic support and attendance policies. We attempt to accomplish this by providing both written materials and a series of training and orientation sessions.

Each adjunct professor is provided with a copy of our Adjunct Faculty Handbook. It explains procedures for audio-visual equipment use, teaching technology, book orders, telephones, parking permits, secretarial support, office availability, and library and online database access. In addition, it contains our school's attendance, examination and grading policies as well as our policy statements on sexual harassment, student records, confidentiality and drug and alcohol abuse. Also provided is a thirty page Teaching Tips Booklet which includes tips from members of our full time faculty on everything from syllabus drafting and the first day of class to final examination options.

At the outset of each semester, we hold a dinner meeting for orientation and

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training of adjunct faculty, and for the purpose of giving adjunct faculty an opportunity to meet one another as well as to become acquainted with law school personnel and processes. New adjunct professors are expected to attend and returning adjunct faculty are encouraged to attend. Among those who attend on behalf of the law school are the dean and vice dean, persons in charge of various administrative offices, including our Registrar's Office, the Office of Student Affairs, and the Legal Information Center and Career Development Office. The dean or vice dean provides updates on positive developments at the law school as well as an overview of the curriculum. New policies are described and a panel of full time faculty members generally leads a discussion of teaching techniques, including the incorporation of our newest teaching technology. (An outline from one of our teaching discussions is attached as Appendix A.)

III. REVIEWING ADJUNCT PERFORMANCE

It is important that the performance of adjunct faculty be reviewed, especially in the case of new adjunct faculty members. We do this through periodic classroom observations by the vice dean and members of our adjunct review committee, a committee of full-time faculty members charged with coordinating our review of adjunct faculty. Student evaluations are reviewed by the dean as well as by the vice dean for the appropriate campus. If potential problems are revealed, the dean or vice dean can discuss them with the faculty member to ensure that the problems are fairly identified and understood. Where appropriate, the dean or vice dean can suggest steps to avoid such problems in the future. Fortunately, our faculty committee, made up of excellent teachers, is usually good at spotting problems early enough to help the adjunct resolve them before evaluations are done at the end of the semester. Often the observer is chosen because of a shared interest in the subject matter and the observations and informal follow-up discussions help build a rewarding professional association for both the full timer and the adjunct.

Because we screen carefully before hiring and try to provide timely support, it has been rare that we need to discontinue our relationship with an adjunct. When it is necessary, however, it is best to find a low key and non-judgmental way to do it and one that fully recognizes the time, effort and service represented by the adjunct's efforts. Ideally, it will be a friendly parting in which both parties value their time in partnership. Sometimes, a person not cut out for teaching because of schedule or temperament will be perfect for another volunteer role in the law school community.

IV. APPRECIATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Adjunct professors provide a lot to the law school. Despite their full time careers, they make time to prepare for class and travel through rush hour and, sometimes, blizzards to get to class on time. They teach with energy and fit exam grading into their schedules whether convenient or not. They do this out of a sense of service, a sense of duty to the profession and a belief in our justice system and the future of our society. I admire them. As I got to know some of

our adjunct professors better, I learned that they valued the role of professor and found it satisfying. I learned that they especially valued their interaction with our full time faculty. I also learned that some occasionally felt their efforts were not always noticed by the full-time faculty and administration.

For these reasons, with the support of our vice deans and faculty, I recently began to hold regular adjunct faculty appreciation dinners for each campus. Our dinners are special events. We hold them at nice restaurants or meeting halls. We have notable keynote speakers. Particularly important, we invite the spouses and partners of adjunct professors. It is they who have to do the missed chores and they who sacrifice their time with our faculty member so that he or she can help our students. It is they who have to bring these people back to reality when they return from classrooms where people write down every word they say and laugh at their every attempt at humor. Appreciation for the sacrifices made by family members is an important theme of every dinner.

Some members of the full-time faculty and administration are invited as well and distribute themselves around the room to enhance the feeling of community. At the outset of the evening, we go around the room and every faculty member introduces himself or herself and describes both the course taught and his or her full-time career. This helps people with common interests to more readily find each other. Subsequent discussions may also lead to referrals and other business relationships.

As part of our new dinner tradition, we present an outstanding adjunct faculty member award and plaque each year on each campus. In addition, we provide recognition plaques to every adjunct faculty member reaching five or more years of service. The awards and plaques are appreciated and proudly hung in many law offices and judicial chambers, resulting in great advertising and an enhancement in the law school's reputation.

Last year, I tried an experiment. I asked each table to discuss, during dinner, what they found satisfying about adjunct law teaching. What do they tell their families? What do they tell themselves when making the long drive in bad weather or when facing a set of exams to grade? I then asked them, after dinner, to select one person from each table to share with the group one or two of the stories from their discussion. On both campuses, the stories they shared were inspiring. Some talked of the learning you have to do to teach and how teaching gave them a new enthusiasm for the law. Others talked of the satisfaction of seeing former students in practice and knowing that they had contributed to those persons' development and success. Many talked of the satisfaction of getting to know students and the awesome responsibility of being trusted with their personal confidences. Not only did their stories motivate each other but they were a powerful reminder to the full-time faculty present just how fortunate we are to be able to teach law as our primary vocation.

My experience is that it is difficult to show too much appreciation. The lawyers, judges and government officials who serve as adjunct professors are wonderful role models. They are the kind of people we want our students to become. Let's tell them.

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APPENDIX A.: Outline from an Adjunct Orientation Session

To: Members of the Adjunct Law Faculty
Fr: Douglas Ray
Re: Responding to the Needs of the Evening Law Student
Date: Spring, 2003

Many of us had the privilege of attending law school on a full time basis. For most, it occupied fifty or more hours a week. Our evening students do not have the luxury of full time study. Like most of you, they rush to law school from work, sometimes fighting traffic for more than an hour, skipping meals and having little time to catch their breath. They bring to the classroom a wealth of real life experiences and a solid grounding in how the world works. They are often exhausted, however, and do not have much time. Since their weekdays are full with work and class, they have to do their studying on weekends. As exams approach, they have to make every unclaimed minute work for them. Because of these pressures, it takes a special teacher to meet their needs. They need you to be more efficient, more organized and more interesting than many of the people who taught you when you were a law student. The following outline is designed to raise some of the issues they face.

A. Relevance—"Why Are They Telling Me This?"

Most evening law students are spending their own money, whether earned or borrowed. Because they are not immersed in the world of academia, they will often have a more practical approach. Because their time is limited, they want to be sure they are spending it on important things.

1. Introduce course, subject, class and subtopic explaining why it is relevant and how it fits in.
2. "Sell" the relevance.
3. Show the practical application.
Newspaper articles, etc. can make it real. Our research librarians can help.

B. Context—"Where Does This Fit?"

Evening students rush to school from work, have only stolen study moments after the weekend and often have family or work issues on their minds as they arrive. The more quickly you can put the day's topic into context for them, the more effective you will be.

1. Use a complete syllabus in topical outline format with descriptive section headings .
2. Introduce each class and subtopic by placing it into context with the prior class and subtopic.
3. Some teachers present a brief outline to show organization of class session.

C. Efficiency—"Don't Let Them Waste My Time."

Evening students want their money's worth. Many have calculated that a 3 credit course meeting two times a week at a private university can be costing them close to \$100 a session. They are likely to be impatient with classmates who seem to dominate class discussion, especially those with long and off point questions and they will expect you to keep the class on track.

1. Make your plan for the class session clear. "This hour we will cover . . ."
2. Find a polite way to deflect off point questions.
"That's an interesting idea. Let's talk after class." "Let's save that for October when we discuss exceptions." (Make a note so you can call on that student in October, thus appearing to have a great memory and dazzling the student in question.)
3. On the first night of class, explain that your job is to ensure that you cover the topic and that everyone is involved. For that reason, you might cut someone off and move on, not because they're necessarily wrong but because it may be someone else's turn or they may be raising a point you want to reach later. This gives you a license to keep control. In a full classroom, the strong-willed student is not entitled to a one on one tutorial while the rest of the class stews or counts ceiling tiles.

D. Engagement—"Help me stay interested."

After eight to ten hours at work and one to two hours of traffic, a sleep deprived evening student needs help to stay alert.

1. Vary the pace, mixing lecture, Socratic and discussion.
This can help you feel more energized as well.
2. Include visual aids at least occasionally.
If you regularly use Powerpoint or the Smartboard, reengage the students from time to time by turning off the machine, sitting on the table and leading a genuine discussion.
3. Consider variations such as 5-minute spontaneous mock arguments, row 1 vs. row 4, or a 5 minute break to go into small groups, discuss a problem, report and vote on the outcome.
4. When you question them, put them into the role of the lawyer and make them think.
How you ask questions can matter.

E. Time Management—"Help me get my work done."

Evening students do not generally have elastic time schedules. Last minute assignments can make them tense and give them a sense of hopelessness. Providing adequate notice can help them retain a sense of control over their fate.

1. Early notice of projects and assignments.
2. Early notice of exam format and what materials can be used.
3. Regular pacing of reading assignments rather than back-end loading.
4. Consider occasional in-class review sessions for last part of a class session

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with substantial notice of timing and scope so that students can prepare questions. (Note: it works best if you organize each review session by topic area. Deal with topic A first then questions on topic B, etc. to avoid haphazard skipping around and to ensure notes are valuable.) (Out of class review sessions are also appreciated but we need to ensure we offer them at times accessible to all students in class.)

F. Summary

There is much to admire in evening students' commitment to learning. The work habits they need to survive going to law school while holding a full time job will serve them well in law practice. Although we recognize the burdens they face, our goal is not to water down their education to make it easier. We have a duty to them and to the public to ensure that they learn as much and are as prepared as our full time students. Rather, my hope is that we can design our courses and our teaching to respond to their needs in a way that will help them succeed.