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Community Engagement and Social Activism in Legal

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SMALL SCHOOL.
BIG VALUE.

This edition of our annual newsletter focuses on community engagement and activism by law professors. Our contributors were asked to share their thoughts on what this looks like for law professors and how it can enrich and challenge teaching and scholarship. I wish to express deep appreciation to our contributors for providing their unique perspectives on these topics, and more importantly, for engaging in the work that they are doing. We are better for their efforts.

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Community Engagement and Social Activism in Legal Academia

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Crossing the Doctrine-Skills Divide: The Value in Breaking Down Silos

There are times that being a law professor can be a bit disorienting. This is especially true early in your career as you find your footing in the classroom and in a new institution. Most new law professors find comradeship with other newly minted law professors and with their more experienced colleagues who teach in similar subject areas. As you begin to build on these new relationships I would encourage you also reach out to the clinicians on your faculty for both support and potential collaborative projects. As a new law professor, I found finding those common spaces for collaboration with my doctrinal colleagues invaluable early in my career. Students benefit from these collaborative endeavors in significant ways as well. It is important that our students observe the ways that lawyers work together as they respond to community need, conduct community outreach, wrestle with difficult legal issues, and engage in varied approaches to problem solving. Last, but surely not least, is that these collaborations can lay the foundation for deep and meaningful friendships that will sustain you over the years.

Unfortunately, there remain law schools where the divide between doctrinal and clinical programs is still deeply felt. Although with an increased focus on the value of various forms of experiential learning across the curriculum, I remain hopeful that this divide will continue to narrow. Regardless of where your particular institution positions itself, do not lose sight of the value of finding ways to bridge that divide. From a clinician's perspective, working with new doctrinal faculty can bring a freshness to existing clinical practices. Clinic students are very fond of learning about your practice experience, your skills developing policy, drafting legislation, or in direct client representation. If those experiences still resonate with you, you might consider how your experience can augment specific clinic classes. Most clinicians I have had the pleasure to work with over the years welcome that participation from kindred colleagues.

With so much community need, there is almost always the potential for rich collaboration when community organizations reach out to the law school for guidance on a pressing community issue, or when specific organizations seek out faculty expertise in a particular area of

law. These opportunities provide fertile ground for collaboration with clinical faculty. One recent project at the University of New Mexico involved the implementation of the Real ID Act in New Mexico. This collaboration involved our state district court, our state legal aid organization and their volunteer attorney program, four out of five of our clinical sections, and clinic and doctrinal faculty. In this instance, a district court judge reached out to a member of our faculty to determine whether the law school and our clinic program might assist potential clients file petitions for name changes. Professor George Bach, a “doctrinal” professor who also rotates into our clinic, was integral to the planning of the overall project and collaborated with the clinicians by supervising clinic students on the day.

Another recent project involved Professor Jenny Moore. Professor Moore teaches Human Rights, Immigration and International Law at the University of New Mexico School of Law. Recently, she worked as a consultant with a working group on our main campus in advance of the repeal of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA). This working group requested very specific information on the impact of federal funding should UNM declare itself a sanctuary campus. Professor Moore reached out to our clinic program to find out ways the clinic could be involved in helping individual students with DACA matters as well as whether our clinic students could assist the working group with research on what if any impact becoming a sanctuary campus would have on the receipt of federal funding at the university.

Ultimately, Professor Moore collaborated with Professor Sarah Steadman and her clinic students on an important presentation to the working group. Professor Moore describes her experience working with Professor Steadman and the clinic students as a “wonderful opportunity to observe how clinicians work with the students to prepare.” She also appreciated observing how Professor Steadman “let the students do the work, field the questions, and use their knowledge and critical thinking skills” during the presentation to the working group. This prompted her to reflect on her own classroom teaching and, as a result, she gives her students more time in the classroom to work through difficult questions. She recognizes using some of the clinic methodology “fosters deeper learning and reflection when less controlled by the professor at the podium.”

These are just a couple of recent examples of doctrinal/clinic program collaboration at our institution. Over the years there have been many, many others. And I have no doubt they will continue to happen. These collaborations have clear benefits for both clinicians and doctrinal faculty. Working with your clinical program has the added benefit of helping you to understand how your clinical program fits with the overall mission of your institution. Equally as important is knowing that our students benefit in myriad ways as well. You might also consider how working in interdisciplinary spaces can inform your teaching and scholarship as you continue to grow as a law professor. Finally, even though it may take a while for you to feel grounded in your new role, I urge you to see yourself as an invaluable link in bringing together your law school communities.

Professor Organick, a citizen of the Diné Nation, born to the Tsenijikini Clan (Cliff Dweller Clan), is a Professor of Law at the University of New Mexico, where she also serves as the Associate Dean of Experiential Learning. She is a past Chair of the AALS section on Indian Nations and Indigenous Peoples. She can be reached at organick@law.unm.edu.

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AALS

New Law Professors Section

A Message from the Chair

Dear Colleagues,

I still remember what it felt like to attend my first AALS Annual Meeting several years ago. I was new to our profession, and I didn't know many people. By chance, I happened to wander into a panel being hosted by the Section on New Law Professors. I recall the atmosphere vividly. The panel was called "Developing as a Legal Scholar: Thoughts for New Law Professors," and the room was jam-packed. Five distinguished academics were discussing how they developed into legal scholars. Their remarks were delivered with an eye toward aiding those of us new to the academy. They discussed how they managed to balance work and family commitments, how they evaluated scholarship within and outside their fields, and how they chose new scholarly projects to pursue. After the panel ended, most of the audience ran off to another panel, but I stuck around. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and told me that the business meeting for the Section on New Law Professors was about to begin. To my great surprise, I was invited to join the meeting.

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