

BRIDGING THE DOCTRINAL AND SKILLS GAP IN FAMILY LAW

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My Project's Goal

- ❖ Design a class in which I could improve student understanding of critical, doctrinal concepts through the integration of research and writing exercises.
- ❖ Lessen the abstraction of family law jurisprudence and provide several opportunities for hands on application of the material.

Methods to Meet my Project's Goal

- ❖ Supplement case book readings with four, discrete written exercises.
- ❖ Incorporate several legal research exercises, two of which related to written exercises.
- ❖ Inclusion of a negotiation and mediation exercise.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

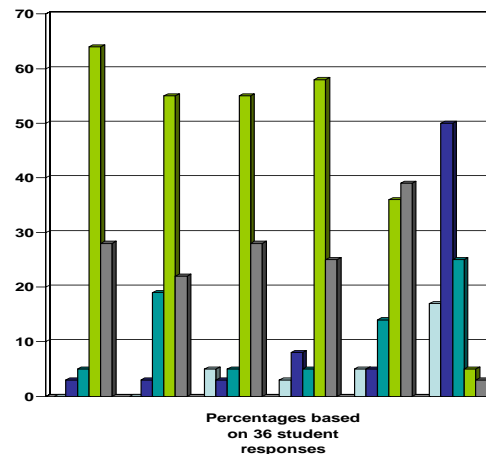
- ❖ Ask students to complete a questionnaire for each doctrinal unit of the course seeking feedback regarding the efficacy of the written assignment as well as a final questionnaire seeking feedback of the course as a whole.

Data

- ❖ 64% agreed and 28% strongly agreed that performing outside research enhanced their understanding of class materials.
- ❖ 55% agreed and 28% strongly agreed that they had a greater doctrinal understanding because they were required to write about key course issues.
- ❖ 36% agreed and 39% strongly agreed that integrating practical exercises made them more interested in the material.
- ❖ Only 5% agreed and 3% strongly agreed that professors should stick to the traditional, Socratic method.

Student Feedback

- ❖ The graph below represents feedback my students provided to four statements:
- ❖ 1. Performing outside research enhances my understanding of class materials.
- ❖ 2. I am very comfortable with the material we have covered in the course to date.
- ❖ 3. I think I have a greater comprehension of the course materials because I had to write about some of the key course issues.
- ❖ 4. I think I have a greater comprehension of the course materials because I have had to research some of the key course issues.
- ❖ 5. Integrating some practical exercises in the class made me more interested in the material.
- ❖ 6. I think law professors should stick to the traditional, Socratic method.



Legend: Strongly disagree (light blue), Disagree (dark blue), Neutral (teal), Agree (light green), Strongly Agree (grey)

Conclusions

- ❖ Students report that the research and written exercises are not a substitute for class readings and class discussion, but enhance comprehension of difficult concepts and subtle policy considerations.
- ❖ For example, after submitting one of two research memoranda, students reported that the memo:
 - “took the class information further than I could have learned by mere reading or lecture”
 - “really helped a lot – engraved it in my head”
 - “good balance to the discussion”
 - “helped me put the pieces together”
 - “I got a flavor for the procedural posture as well as the more abstract ‘law’ behind paternity in MI.”

Next Steps and Reflection

- ❖ Explore ways to integrate discrete research and/or writing exercises in all my courses.
- ❖ My students were very engaged this semester and the level of classroom discourse was at an all time high.
- ❖ Several students told me at the end of the semester that they were grateful for the integration of multiple exercises.

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