

The added value of an international human rights clinic over a lecture or seminar course is the exposure students get to the range of lawyering activities — and the chance to be engaged in the process of developing and promoting human rights norms. Students learn that lawyering can be pursued in many places in a variety of ways. This exposure is especially meaningful given that international law is constantly evolving and subject to change as customs change. Like impact litigation, where the purpose is to create new (and better) law, much of human rights work is ground-breaking. Thus, students have a unique opportunity to look critically at existing law and to participate in the struggle to create an alternative vision of global justice.

As legal, political, economic, and social institutions become increasingly transnational, international law and human rights norms and mechanisms become increasingly ubiquitous and central to the fulfilment of justice. If we agree that the legal profession has a responsibility to ‘enhance the capacity of law and legal institutions to do justice,’ and that law schools are called upon to contribute to the fulfilment of this responsibility, then the principal concern is how to make this objective meaningful and relevant for the next generation of lawyers.

This concern is reflected in the expansion of international and comparative law offerings in law schools across the country. Legal educators no longer debate the value of clinical education for the inculcation of skills and professional ethics with justice at their core. Thus, inevitably, the international human rights clinic will emerge as a prominent method for preparing law students for meaningful practice in the contemporary, and manifestly global, legal landscape.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Using distance learning to enhance cross-listed interdisciplinary law school courses

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Courses that are interdisciplinary in their approach to teaching substance and skills and that include graduate students from other disciplines can be a valuable addition to legal education. In addition to enabling students to share different perspectives, such courses provide an ideal environment for teaching law students to collaborate with other types of professionals. This is increasingly essential to the effective practice of law.

Notwithstanding these benefits, the capacity of law schools to offer cross-listed courses is constrained by numerous logistical and administrative challenges. Distance learning or distance education — the use of computers, telecommunications, and digital networking to permit learning outside the boundaries of the classroom — holds the potential to expand the availability of cross-listed courses by reducing these barriers. Equally important, distance learning can provide professors of cross-listed courses with pedagogical tools for enhancing interdisciplinary communication and collaboration, and circumventing some of the problems inherent in teaching students from different disciplines.

For law professors specifically, cross-listed courses present unique pedagogical challenges stemming from the difficulty of teaching a class comprised of students who are near-experts in legal analysis, the language of the law, and the legal system and students who are novices. Moreover, it is crucial but extremely difficult to create an environment in which these two groups of students, coming from different backgrounds, professional cultures and knowledge bases, are not mutually intimidated.

In the author’s class on public health law, offered to law students and graduate students in public health, distance learning was used, presenting the opportunity to evaluate its ability to: (1) facilitate teaching at different levels to students from two disciplines; (2) enhance interdisciplinary interaction and collaboration; and (3) reduce the barriers associated with time and place constraints.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the capacity of distance education technology to enhance the effectiveness of cross-listed interdisciplinary courses. It is intended to help professors use distance education to make new and established law school courses accessible to graduate students studying other disciplines. Additionally, since there is little scholarship on the unique pedagogical challenges presented by cross-listed law school courses, this article offers some general observations and suggestions that will hopefully be useful to teachers of these courses, regardless of whether or not they employ distance education.

The course sought to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration by introducing each group of students to the foundational principles, language, theoretical perspectives, and problem-solving approaches of the other discipline. Because both groups of students intended to practice their respective professions within a public-interest setting, the course concentrated on the public policy implications of the law and provided training in interdisciplinary collaboration within the simulated context of a government public health agency.

Aside from separate introductory lectures delivered to each group of students on the first day, live classes were conducted using the discussion method. A considerable portion of live classes was

devoted to differences and similarities between the problem-solving methodologies of law and public health. The goal of these discussions was to identify the distinct contributions that each discipline can make to the formulation of public health policy. These discussions culminated in the creation of a holistic model for generating and evaluating alternative solutions to public health problems that incorporated the dominant concerns and perspectives of both disciplines.

Distance education technology was employed to enhance the scope and depth of the course's substantive coverage, increase opportunities for and reduce barriers to interdisciplinary interaction, and remedy specific administrative and logistical problems. Specifically, a course website was created to enlarge the sphere of informational resources used in the course and expedite communication with the class. Asynchronous online discussion forums were used to increase opportunities for student-to-student and student-to-teacher communication by reducing the constraints imposed by time and space.

The success of cross-listed courses largely depends on the willingness of students from both disciplines to engage in an open and multidimensional exploration of the subject. Given the vast differences in the professional cultures and languages of individual disciplines, it is a considerable challenge to create a learning environment in which students from both disciplines feel sufficiently comfortable to share their perspectives and experiences, openly question the opinions and assumptions of the other discipline, and express their own opinions about an unfamiliar subject in the presence of a group of experts.

Post-class discussion forums were effective at breaking down barriers to interdisciplinary communication and increasing the ability of each group to benefit from the other's expertise and perspectives. In contrast, the pre-class discussion forums did not achieve their objective.

Distance education technology provides a number of tools for teaching at different levels. For example, online discussion forums permit more or less sophisticated discussions of the same material simultaneously. After each live class, the author initiated several discussion threads on the post-class forum that were deliberately targeted to students at different levels. This multilevel approach, which is not available in the traditional classroom, usually succeeded in eliciting the participation of students at different levels. In addition, the course website significantly enlarged the realm of informational resources that could be employed to meet students' different educational needs and appetites.

Distance learning technology also provides a number of tools for reducing the risk of student disengagement. In any course, students' levels of engagement rise and fall according to whether the material and class discussions are below, equal to, or beyond their level of knowledge and analytical competence. This is especially the case in a cross-listed course, where the risk of student withdrawal is heightened because of the need to teach at different levels.

Courses that bring law students together with students from other professional schools provide an exciting environment for teaching interdisciplinary collaboration and exploring the contributions that other disciplines can make to the solution of legal problems. While cross-listed courses present considerable pedagogical, logistical, and administrative challenges, many of these challenges can be significantly reduced by the use of distance education technology.

Diversity in legal education: a broader view, a deeper commitment

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'Diversity' is prominent among the values law schools embrace today. From the hospitable language of admissions brochures to the array of programs for outreach and retention, law schools have put in place a variety of measures for accomplishing this aim. Historical data on enrolments show that through such efforts over the past twenty-five years law schools have made enormous strides toward realising their goal.

However, there is much room for progress. In fact, the latest enrolment figures show that law schools have fallen short of complete success, particularly with regard to minorities. And many law students find that their school's hospitality seems to end with the last page of the recruitment brochure. Even with women enrolled in numbers nearly equal to men, for example, women continue to report encountering a hostile environment once they enter law school.

To date, the quest for diversity has been largely consumed with producing a student body roughly reflective of the demographic makeup of the community at large. The strategy reflects the expectation that from the larger and more representative presence of historically under-represented students, institutions would naturally evolve over time and structurally adjust to the greater diversity. This approach has not been entirely successful in legal education. There has been less attention, moreover,

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