

Leaning into Uncertainty

Ensuring
Quality
Legal
Education
During
Coronavirus



Conference Report

Roundtable 3: Maintaining High Quality Experiential
Learning Opportunities from a Distance





The third roundtable, titled “**Maintaining High Quality Experiential Learning Opportunities from a Distance**,” focused on ensuring high-quality experiential education in the fall, with an emphasis on community- and client-centered experiences, including clinics, externships, and pro bono opportunities. More than 200 participants engaged in lively discussions regarding different dimensions and questions surrounding what it means to continue to offer meaningful experiential courses and programs under the current conditions of uncertainty.

One of the themes that emerged was the need to pivot toward generating meaningful work that can be done remotely, which may require creating new collaborative networks and relationships. Examples include city- and nation-wide efforts to create a clearinghouse to match up client and community needs with student and supervisory resources. Another theme explored how to facilitate faculty working closely with students and community partners in order to navigate external challenges, such as the uncertainty and inconsistency around court proceedings and clients’ access to technology. A third theme centered around the need to cultivate intentional and creative methods for supporting and sustaining student engagement at the individual and group levels.

Participants offered a range of different examples of group-building activities that they have begun experimenting with this past spring and summer. They acknowledged that trying to introduce these activities with an entirely new cohort of students will undoubtedly present new challenges.

Overall, the small group discussions revealed a number of important and timely concerns and offered helpful strategies and techniques for approaching some of the expected challenges.

Susan L. Brooks, Associate Dean for Experiential Learning and Professor of Law at Drexel University Thomas R. Kline School of Law, organized the roundtable. **Christine N. Cimini**, Associate Dean for Experiential Education and Professor of Law at University of Washington School of Law, and **Alicia Alvarez**, Associate Dean for Experiential Education and Professor of Law at UIC John Marshall Law School, The University of Illinois at Chicago, presented the session.



Question I. Students losing paid work opportunities—what can law schools do to create and implement meaningful experiential opportunities for these students?

1. **Checking in with students:**
 - a. Faculty, administrators, and staff should hold frequent check-ins, including giving advice or just a listening ear.
2. **External funding sources**
3. **Finding new and different opportunities:**
 - a. Partnering with law firms, bar associations, alumni, and seeing what other schools have done to increase student opportunities;
 - b. Seeking ways to get additional students into clinics via group work;
 - i. Splitting projects differently?
 - c. Expanding pro bono opportunities/keeping them open during the summer; and
 - ii. Spreadsheet of pro bono opportunities nation-wide
 - d. Working with faculty on projects.
4. **Shifting expectations:**
 - a. This is a learning experience for everyone;
 - b. “Something is better than nothing”; and
 - c. Redefining what legal work means.
5. **Supplementing students’ summer jobs:**
 - a. School-led Zoom sessions, and
 - b. Guiding students in how to adjust from the in-person work experience to a remote work experience.

Question II. The court system in a moment of paralysis/uncertainty—how are different courts responding and how can we provide effective live client opportunities or externships in the context of court systems that are operating at various capacities?

1. **Shifting expectations:**
 - a. More value in pleadings, certifications, non-courtroom work;
 - b. Expanding work that can be done remotely/online;
 - c. Switching clinic offerings for the fall to the spring; and



- d. Uncertainty as to what students will actually be able to do in these externships/clinics.

2. Reviewing best practices:

- b. State bar organizations, local bar associations, NITA, ABA, etc.;
- c. How to best humanize clients in remote litigation settings; and
- d. Watching live court from home for experience, opportunities for reflection.

Question III. Impact on clients most in need—given the increasing reliance on tech as a means to connect with clients and access justice, how can we create systems that will help our students reach those most in need (in either the clinical or externship setting)?

1. Differing client needs:

- a. Some clients may not have access to technology;
- b. Clients may prefer certain methods of technological communication over others;
- c. Clients may be able to meet in-person (socially distanced) but only at late hours; and
- d. Ability to use Zoom, Skype, Google Voice, over the phone.

2. Spreading awareness and working with community organizations to ensure the community can access technology:

- a. This may also be hindering clients from reaching out to representation.
- b. What fundraising opportunities are there beyond grant money?

3. Shifting expectations:

- a. Students will have to spend more time orienting their clients;
- b. “The law school as a center for thinking and creativity about how coalitions work together in a sustainable, nimble, transformative way. The whole law school needs to pivot”; and
- c. “Finding clients in the first instance, give them technology if needed, then provide confidentiality.”
 - i. How can confidentiality be maintained?

Question IV. Building connections remotely—in the absence of in-person connection, how do we as experiential educators create effective connection in the classroom, in supervision with students, and with clients?

1. Creating a community remotely

2. Share with group more about personal life:



- a. Anecdotally, lots of positive feedback from students for professors who invited more checking in and connecting on a personal level among their students;
 - b. Being open about challenges;
 - c. Creative sharing—pet parades; concert t-shirts, favorite memes; and
 - d. Using a social media account for the class (e.g., Instagram).
- 3. Concern for ensuring equity of experience:**
 - a. Students with underlying conditions who would not be able to come to class in-person
- 4. Getting to know students in a new way:**
 - a. Social hours, ice breakers, introductory videos, check-ins, weekly meetings, or office hours
- 5. Social interaction for students via Zoom:**
 - a. Book club, movie club, blogs, or breakout rooms
- 6. Clinics:**
 - a. Pairing multiple students for work over the summer

Conference Planning Committee:

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