

Hybrid Teaching Beyond the Traditional Course

ILTL Workshop Materials from Faculty in the University of North Carolina School of Law's Writing and Learning Resources Center:

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Law students' many and varied learning needs sometimes extend beyond the traditional course "box": the familiar framework of one semester, one professor, classroom sessions, and perhaps some one-on-one meetings. For example, students may lack effective research or writing strategies. They may deeply fear public speaking or know little about managing stress. They may not appreciate law's professionalism demands.

Such needs pose tough challenges. They also create teaching opportunities. UNC is meeting such challenges through cooperative hybrid teaching: collaboration by teams of professors, plus integration of online resources, to help students learn outside the classroom as well as inside it, and both within and beyond the framework of traditional courses.

The cooperative aspect comes from teamwork among the nine law professors in UNC's Writing and Learning Resources Center (WLRC). We focus on teaching practice-oriented legal analysis and professional communication, chiefly through:

- a year-long, required first-year course in research, reasoning, writing, and oral advocacy;
- a bar-preparation course and program; and
- workshops and other offerings outside of courses.

Professors in the WLRC cooperatively design and implement such teaching by:

- jointly developing and sharing teaching strategies and materials;
- scheduling to enhance the timeliness and attractiveness to students of learning materials and services; and
- partnering with persons outside the WLRC from whom students learn skills and gather advice, such as: career-services and student-services officers; student tutors and teaching assistants; and librarians and legal-research vendors.

The hybrid aspect of our teaching comes primarily from creative use of online resources. The essential feature is extension of teaching beyond traditional classrooms. We frequently blend online learning with in-class work, small-group exercises, and optional one-on-one meetings between professors and students. Below are three examples.

A. Listening, Writing, and Professionalism

The Writing and Learning Resources Center increasingly uses a cooperative hybrid approach to help students learn and practice two closely related disciplines: listening and writing. Both disciplines lie at the heart of professional communication for lawyers. Students need to learn what to listen for. They also need to practice gleaning key information and then using it in responsible, fruitful, and efficient interactions with other lawyers, such as supervisors and clients.

The cooperative aspect of teaching such communication starts with agreeing on goals. For example, we reach consensus—at least broadly—about the fundamentals of professional communication, the types of listening and writing that first-year students most need to learn and practice, and our goals for serving students who seek advice on choosing and improving writing samples for job searches. We then work in teams of two or three to create a variety of simulations, assignments, and schedules designed to achieve our goals. We produce online materials that all can share. We also sequence our work to help us cooperate and support one another throughout the academic year.

The hybrid aspect encompasses, among other things, two types of online materials. The first are tutorials. Often these help students to follow up on preparatory reading or in-class discussion or exercises. Topics include, for example, citing wisely and well, choosing legal authorities, and formatting documents such as briefs or writing samples. These online materials help guide students to engage in more advanced work, either in class or individually. They also prepare students to engage professionally in their interactions with faculty. For example, to become eligible for a one-on-one consultation with a professor about a draft writing sample, students first must complete an online tutorial. It describes the students' responsibilities in the consultation process and requires them to prepare by answering questions about their draft sample. The students therefore arrive at their consultation ready to focus promptly on advanced, well-tailored questions, rather than on basic advice or generalities.

A second set of online materials are audio recordings from which students must glean practice-specific types of information. Often they must listen for description of, and advice about, the precise task assigned to them, such as which issues to research or which arguments to strengthen, rebut, or omit. At other

times they must listen for what their (simulated) client wants or cares about. For example, they must write a simple contract that accurately reflects, and judiciously improves, a transaction that a client describes orally.

B. Bar Preparation

We likewise use a cooperative hybrid approach to preparation for the bar exam. A team of professors in the Center teaches a bar-preparation course and offers workshops and consultations. In the course, online quizzes test students' understanding of assigned reading, offer immediate feedback, and prepare the students for follow-up class sessions. Outside the course, an online portal offers access to information about the bar exam, access to preparation resources and workshops, and ways for students to monitor their progress. The portal also accepts submissions of practice essays plus requests for feedback either in person, by telephone, or through an online exchange. Finally, the portal lets students set up regular or ad-hoc consultations and to specify the topics they want to discuss.

C. Oral Advocacy

Cooperative hybrid teaching also works for oral advocacy. At UNC, each first-year student must individually present a graded appellate oral argument near the end of the spring semester. Professors provide classroom instruction and written guidance. Nonetheless, some students feel great anxiety as they imagine orally presenting an argument and answering questions posed by mock judges.

The WLRC provides optional hybrid resources for such students: online materials, oral-advocacy support groups, and individual counseling. First, online video and audio presentations can enhance a student's understanding and awareness. The law school's Sakai site hosts a training video, a demonstration oral argument, links to related online resources such as the Oyez Project, and other instructional materials. Second, students can join groups in which experienced and trained upper-level students re-emphasize—and help students practice—fundamentals such as introductions and impact statements. The group leaders also stress pace, clarity, and style. Finally, support group members can also consult individually with either their own professor or the faculty supervisor for the support groups.