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Three Views of Visiting

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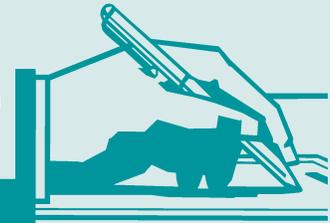


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What Keeps Us Going?

Necessity is the Mother of Re-Invention

Tracy Bach, Vermont Law School

When a past associate dean of the Vermont Law School (VLS) made me the offer in 1996 to join the faculty as a legal writing professor, she kindly but firmly reminded me: *You know that this position ends in three years and that you'll have to leave?* Now, eight years later, I marvel at how things have changed. VLS abolished the cap during my last year on that three-year contract. We replaced the old system with one that required a competitive "rehiring" process (my colleagues and I were not "grandmothered" in), two successive full-faculty reviews, and then long-term, administratively renewable

contracts. Now that our positions are long-term, tenured colleagues have turned to questioning the pay gap between "them" and "us." Given that VLS is a small school and that all writing professors teach additional courses critical to the curriculum (not to mention serving on key committees and publishing scholarship), we've reached the point of mutual head scratching about the significant pay differential. And thus the reinvention of the legal writing professor at VLS is taking place.

Within this larger dynamic of institutional change, I've chosen to challenge myself both in and outside the classroom. For example, the full-faculty review process presented an avenue for reinventing myself as a colleague in teaching. I approached these reviews as opportunities to educate faculty colleagues about just what it is we do when teaching legal research, analysis, and writing. I urged my reviewers to not only observe my large "lecture" sessions, but to look closely at the less obvious, more innovative teaching done in smaller group sessions like practice oral arguments, conferences, and written critiques of drafts. More than one-third of the tenured faculty has thus observed my teaching during the past few years, ranging from the most senior to the most recently tenured. In this manner I've earned the increased understanding—if not respect—of

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Three Views of Visiting

Jim Levy, Nova Southeastern School of Law; Samantha Moppett, Suffolk University School of Law; and Terry Pollman, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, William S. Boyd School of Law
Ed. Note: During the summer of 2001 and 2002, Jim Levy, then teaching at Colorado and currently teaching at Nova Southeastern, taught advanced appellate advocacy as a visitor at UNLV. Samantha Moppett, of Suffolk, visited UNLV during the summer of 2003. Terry Pollman hired Jim and Sam as visitors. Here are their remarks on the impact of visiting. First, Samantha reflects on the professional experience. Then, Jim tells the story of summer in Las Vegas. Finally, Terry observes that Jim and Sam's visit contributed in important ways to the legal writing program at UNLV.

Samantha Moppett: It was great for professional growth

Like many members of the legal writing community, I am annually faced with the query of how to earn some much needed supplemental income during the summer months. Last summer, I struggled with whether to bask in the sun as a lifeguard and swimming instructor or to visit at another law school and teach a summer class. Ultimately, I accepted a visiting position teaching Appellate Advocacy at the William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I was excited both

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Re-Invention

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colleagues, and have had many an interesting conversation about pedagogy. Perhaps not consequently, I've been asked to teach other core courses, join the Curriculum Committee, and co-teach a seminar with a tenured colleague.

I've also challenged myself to continually reinvent the classroom. I received a fellowship to attend a Vermont Campus Compact workshop on problem-based service learning, which focuses on bringing real world problem-solving into the classroom. Since legal writing course work has always been problem-based, it seemed like a natural progression to move from simulation to a real client with a real problem. I thus worked with a local coalition of non-profits and government agencies concerned about lead-paint poisoning and incorporated some of their research and analysis needs into my second-semester LRW curriculum. (Our new three-credit course has five sections set in different substantive areas and students have the opportunity to select one according to their preferences. Given strong interest in VLS's environmental law program, I set mine in environmental health law.) I emphasized collaborative work, which resulted in law firm memos on a sizable research task, rather than shorter, individual work product on exactly the same topic. Students found the research and analysis challenging, but rewarding. Comments like "I have developed a sense of ownership of the project" and "I find myself working hard because my work will impact real people" were typical during a recent course evaluation. By bringing real world problems into the classroom, I've not only avoided the professorial "fatigue" associated with critiquing 43 identical predictive memos, but brought new ideas about learning into the classroom.

Finally, the most spectacular form of reinvention was the leave of absence I took last year to live and work

outside the United States. Having lived in France several times, my husband and I had long dreamed of taking our family to a francophone African country for an extended period of time. My faculty colleagues didn't blink an eye when I requested the leave (a first from a legal writing professor), and the law school not only hired a visitor to teach my courses but generously continued my health insurance. My family and I spent most of the year in Rwanda, where my physician husband worked at two local hospitals and a refugee camp, and my children attended a Belgian school (entering without a word of French) and played *football* when not in classes. I enjoyed doing a wide variety of things. On the homefront, I boiled and filtered water daily, negotiated food prices at the *marché* (and learned how to cook it at 1800 meters), and helped my sons navigate the vagaries of European pedagogy. I used my bilingualism to serve as a substitute English teacher in a K-7 program and to work as a translator for a Rwandan consulting firm conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the country's judicial system post-genocide. And after we became settled in our life in Kigali, Rwanda's political capital, I was ready to venture two hours south via local buses to Butare, the cultural and intellectual center. There I taught *Introduction à la Recherche Scientifique* (essentially LRW I) at the national university's faculty of law.

After I finished this course, we moved from our home in Rwanda, which was just below the Equator, to one just south of the Arctic Circle. In Karelia, Russia, I taught a comparative health law course at Petrozavodsk State University's law faculty, as part of an established exchange with VLS. Suffice it to say, it was an amazing year of growth, both personally and professionally. I taught under a wide range of conditions, to very different student populations, in each of my areas of "expertise." These experiences have forever enriched my teaching, and

encouraged new areas of scholarship. And having attained this life-long dream, I'm already beginning to ponder what comes next.

The former associate dean who was once in charge of enforcing that misguided employment cap policy with me now directs our international programs. She recently sought my assistance as a colleague, to do more in this area. While pay and tenure status have admittedly not kept pace with legal writing programmatic changes at VLS, our opportunities to reinvent ourselves as faculty colleagues certainly have. This almost limitless way of seeing myself challenges me every day and certainly keeps me going. ♦

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to make some spending money and to return to the Southwest. My professional development from the experience, however, far exceeded the monetary and geographical benefits.

I grew professionally from the intellectual challenge of teaching a new course that I could not have taught at my "home" school. For example, I researched and taught for the first time the Ethics of Advocacy, including the ethical issues associated with billing. Moreover, although I had previously taught appellate advocacy, the summer class exposed me to the intricacies of teaching appellate practice in the context of a current United States Supreme Court case.

In addition to growing professionally from the intellectual challenges, I learned new methodologies and teaching tools. Although the course included material that I had taught in the past, my colleagues at UNLV introduced me to new techniques for imparting information and reinforcing the material. This year, I have effectively adapted and incorporated many of these exercises and techniques into my own classes. For example, last summer I placed students into "firms" of approxi-

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mately three students. These firms collaborated on some of the graded assignments. Appreciating the effectiveness of collaborative learning, when I returned home I divided my classes into firms and had the students collaborate on in-class exercises throughout the first year. As a result of these new methodologies and tools, I am more excited about teaching topics that I have taught for six years.

Overall, the visitorship inspired and rejuvenated me. The intellectual challenge of teaching a new class and the introduction to different approaches to teaching have increased my effectiveness and contributed to my evolution as an experienced legal writing professor.

Jim Levy: And it was a great chance to travel

Sure, teaching at UNLV during the summer was a great opportunity to learn from other teachers, contribute to another program and pick up new techniques. And I did learn things that improved my teaching, like a great peer-editing exercise that I've used continually at University of Colorado and now Nova. But the best part was that I got to travel and see a new part of the country. Teaching for a semester in another city is so much better than vacationing there. I had the opportunity to see and do far more things than I ever would have done during even the most leisurely vacation.

Heck, just driving to Las Vegas—through the mountains of Colorado, the breathtaking canyons of Utah and the “Thelma and Louise” country of Arizona’s painted desert—was incredible. Once I arrived, I found an almost limitless number of things to do in my spare time. Every night after teaching I had my choice of some of the country’s best restaurants just minutes from school. It was always a tough choice—should I check out the Bellagio buffet (which has to be seen to be believed), Wolfgang Puck’s Cafe, some sushi at Nobu, or maybe head over (again) to

one of the best burger joints I’ve ever been to, “In-n-Out Burger.”

The southwest possesses such a desolate, unworldly beauty it’s like visiting another planet. Las Vegas is smack dab in the middle of the Mojave Desert, one of the hottest climates on earth. Experiencing it in the summer, when breaking down in your car on a lonely stretch of road can put your life at risk, gives it a special edge. It was a kick to visit Death Valley in July just to find out what 126 degrees in the shade feels like, something few people will ever experience (I chose to stay home the day it hit 134). It was neat to walk down to the bottom of the dry lake bed at Bad Water, just past Furnace Creek, to stand in the lowest spot in the western hemisphere.

One weekend I drove through the California desert and wound up stopping at a dilapidated museum near Barstow devoted to the bygone era of burlesque. I was shocked to learn that former burlesque star Tempest Storm, who dated Frank Sinatra and Elvis during her heyday as a headliner on the Strip, was living there alone and broke “on the property” in a sun-bleached trailer. One of the most memorable experiences was a weekend trip along old Route 66 in Northern Arizona, past forgotten ghost towns now inhabited only by the scores of Japanese and German tourists so fascinated with American car culture. Perhaps the weirdest trip was my visit to the once super-secret Nevada Test Site where, after gaining a security clearance, I toured what remains of the desert atomic bombs test sites featured in so many government films and cheesy monster movies from the 1950s.

Because I was living in Las Vegas for several months, it was easy to find time during the week to take in nearby sights like the Liberace Museum, Elvis-A-Rama and the Gambling Museum. I became a regular at the Peppermill—one of the last vestiges of “Old Las Vegas”—where I could lounge after work in full retro swankiness around the flame pit (“it’s a pool of gurgling

water but it’s also on fire!”), sipping Blue Hawaiians and waiting to see if Las Vegas local Penn Jillette, of Penn & Teller, would show up at his favorite after-hours watering hole.

So next time you get a call from a legal writing director at another school asking if you’re interested in teaching there for a semester, convince your Dean that this would be a great opportunity to learn and grow professionally. And then remember to pick up some good guide books, a map, comfortable walking shoes and a good appetite for adventure. You’re going to have a great semester.

Terrill Pollman: Looking at home through new eyes

My grandmother was fond of the saying, “Travel broadens.” And I always remember the old joke about the saying that suggests the extra calories travelers inevitably consume are likely to broaden the traveler’s hips. But the saying, of course, refers not to anatomy, but to enlarging the viewpoint of the traveler. Sam and Jim have spoken eloquently to that. I have learned during the last three summers, however, that in addition to changing the traveler’s viewpoint, having travelers visit enlarges the perspective of those on the receiving end of the visit. Jim and Sam’s visits at UNLV have broadened the horizons of everyone in our program, without any of us ever leaving home.

I knew Jim and Sam before they visited, and I expected that our students would benefit from their expert teaching. I even anticipated the “cross pollination factor”—that we would both gain from the exchange of teaching plans, tips and ideas. That anticipation was happily filled with both Jim and Sam. For example, we are still using the MPT question that Jim wrote for us two summers ago. What I did not expect, however, was the wonderful way that Jim and Sam gave us the chance to look at our own familiar setting in an entirely new way.

At the time of the visits, several members of our legal writing faculty

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had come to UNLV as novice teachers; they had never taught in another program. They understood the characteristics of teaching in our program as just the “normal” way of doing things. But whether the conversation regarded the substance we taught, the teaching methods we used, or the conditions of employment at the law school, hearing the visitors’ surprise about things we considered commonplace led us all to re-examine our own practices. Following a listserv discussion of job conditions is one thing, but learning that a colleague is not allowed to attend faculty meetings (we attend and have voting rights) or that a colleague gets paid for coaching a moot court team (we do not) is another. Reading a suggestion to incorporate games in the classroom has substantially less impact than seeing Sam’s PowerPoint presentation that plays the Family Feud theme song as it asks students to join in a game of “Firm Feud.” Complaining about grading a stack of forty briefs last semester sounds hollow when talking to someone who has just graded sixty. And despite the differences, shared viewpoints also emerge constantly—such as the notion that forty and sixty are both just too many briefs to grade!

It was not just our program or our school that started to look different to us, but also Las Vegas. The temperature in southern Nevada in June is usually a serious business. We all complain bitterly about it. But Sam came to Las Vegas from one of the coldest winters on record in Boston. While we all sighed about the hot weather, she sat outside on the patio to grade papers. It made us all think again. And as you can tell from Jim’s delightful essay above, Jim taught us to relax and enjoy wacky Las Vegas

Take a New Perspective on What You Teach: Host (or Become) a Fulbright Scholar

Diane Penneys Edelman, Villanova University School of Law

One of the most rewarding experiences I’ve had during the past few years is hosting a Fulbright Scholar, who came to the United States specifically to research and observe the teaching of legal analysis and writing—imagine that!

Our visitor, Dr. Nina Hovarava, is a Professor of English at the European Humanities University (EHU) in Minsk, Belarus, one of the former Soviet republics. Although well-known for its law school and other academic departments and centers, EHU’s law faculty lacked a professor to teach this subject. On a trip to

and the surrounding desert. None of us will ever drive past the world’s largest thermometer in the Mojave Desert town of Baker again, without remembering that Jim drove an hour and a half just to see it. And who would believe that meetings at the Peppermill Lounge would become a law school legend—but they have.

These visits have been such a positive experience that we look for ways to continue them. We’ve considered asking other schools if they would be interested in an exchange program where we would not just hire a visitor to fill a need, but arrange for two legal writing professors to exchange jobs for a year. I encourage other programs to consider the idea of an exchange, and put UNLV on the list of places that would be interested in participating. And, like Jim and Sam, I encourage you all to think of putting on your traveling shoes. As my grandmother used to say, “Travel broadens.” ♦

Villanova many years ago, EHU’s then-new law dean, Dr. Alla Sokolova, observed legal writing classes and decided that this was an important subject to teach to her students. She turned to Dr. Hovarava, whose specialty within the field of English is legal analysis and writing. A few years ago, Nina initiated a legal writing course for EHU’s law students, and shortly thereafter, obtained a Fulbright grant to study this subject in the United States.

In the fall of 2002, Nina arrived at Villanova, where she would spend the next four months. During that time, she attended numerous Legal Analysis & Writing classes—often several “versions” of the same week’s class, but taught with different styles and by different professors. She met extensively with members of the Legal Writing faculty, and did the same with members of the Legal Research faculty. She examined and collected legal writing texts, problems, and other teaching materials and literally absorbed all she could about this subject.

Of course, during her visit, Nina did more than study legal writing pedagogy and practice. She became part of the life of the Law School, lunching each day with the faculty, visiting New York and Washington both for pleasure and to develop professional relationships, and hosted us Villanovans at her apartment, abundant with Belarusian specialties. To cap off her visit to the United States, Nina participated on a panel at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Schools, at which she spoke about developing legal writing programs for foreign students—not from our usual perspective, but from the perspective of a foreign teacher teaching an