Mission / Purpose

The Georgia State University College of Law is committed to providing a high quality legal education in its full time and part time, day and evening programs. In order to fully prepare students for professional lives as practicing attorneys or professionals making other uses of their professional knowledge and skills, the College of Law uses a variety of teaching methodologies, including the case study method, the Socratic method, lectures, seminars, writing workshops, and clinical education. The College of Law seeks to produce students whose knowledge, performance and behavior exemplify the best of the legal profession. In addition to taking classroom courses, students are encouraged to participate in our two live-client clinics, the Tax Clinic and the HeLP Clinic. The Tax Clinic helps clients resolve issues with the IRS. The HeLP Clinic helps clients who come to the clinic with a variety of legal problems related to health problems. The Tax Clinic works closely with the IRS, while the HeLP Clinic works closely with Egleston Hospital and Atlanta Legal Aid. We also encourage students to engage in significant pro bono activities related to skills they develop in the College of Law. As of Spring 2007, 701 students are enrolled in our JD program. In the academic year 2006-07, beginning with Summer 2006 and ending in Spring 2007, 212 students earned J.D. degrees from the College of Law. Ten of those students earned joint degrees; a breakdown follows. JD/MPA - 2; JD/MBA - 7; JD/MPA - 2; Other -1.

Since the issuance of the Carnegie Report evaluating legal education in the United States, the College of Law has been undergoing a long-term rigorous review of our entire curriculum. In year one, every member of the College faculty was required to read the entire Carnegie Report and participate in "book club" sessions held on weekend days at faculty members' homes. In year two, the Faculty Curriculum Committee was charged with studying our entire curriculum, with an eye to suggesting changes responsive to the Carnegie Report. A student representative was appointed to serve on the Committee, as well. By the end of the year, the Committee had made a series of findings and proposals, and presented them to the faculty. In year three, the faculty held a day-long retreat to consider the Committee's proposals. The retreat, attended by nearly every faculty member, revealed that there were still some wrinkles to be ironed out in the proposals. As a result, significant changes were not approved at the retreat. Nevertheless, there was a consensus that the faculty was committed to moving forward to making substantial changes in our curriculum, primarily those addressed to students' writing skills. All agree that the current required RWA I and RWA II classes do a good job of improving students' writing skills. At the same time, we recognize that many students come into law school with such deficient writing skills that we need far more than two semesters of first year courses to bring them to a "practice-ready" skill level.

Goals

G 1: Basic proficiency in legal writing

Any accredited law school graduate, whether she practices law in a traditional sense or not, needs to be an effective communicator. While oral communication skills often get the most attention in modern American society, the reality is that written communication is more common,
more permanent, and more important. For this reason, we seek to produce law graduates who can communicate in clear written form with clients, the courts and the public. Generally, their written communications are intended to perform three distinct functions: (i) identify relevant legal issues; (ii) identify, explain and analyse the existing law dealing with such issues; (iii) predict resolution of the issues by applying the existing facts to the existing law, or propose legal solutions to deal with them in the future.

G 2: Basic proficiency in legal research
All students must learn how to find the existing law, whether it be in the form of statutes, regulations or caselaw. Students must also learn the proper format for using and citing the law in memos, briefs, and other relevant forums.

G 3: Basic proficiency in fundamental legal principles
All students must learn the fundamentals of the American legal system. Once they learn these fundamentals, they may choose to "specialize" and take courses in specific areas of the law.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

SLO 1: Basic proficiency in objective legal writing (M: 2, 2)
The primary vehicle via which all students must demonstrate writing proficiency occurs in the required RWA I and II courses. All law students must take and pass these courses in order to graduate; indeed, they must do so in order to take any elective courses. In the Fall (RWA I), the objective is to have the students master the art of "objective writing." Students are first provided with a hypothetical legal scenario and "canned" research, already developed by the entire RWA faculty. Students must first produce a "closed memo," in which they objectively describe the issue, the relevant existing law, and their assessment of how a court would resolve the issue. The hypothetical is a "balanced" one, meaning that there are generally equally good arguments to be made that the relevant law supports one result or the other. The student must learn to identify and effectively present the different possible interpretations of the law, and the varying results at which courts might arrive. The memo is written as if a new law associate is presenting the memo to a senior law firm partner who needs to know whether or not to take on a client's case. In the course of writing their memos, students receive constant feedback, both written and oral, from their RWA instructors. The final product is graded using a highly specific grading rubric.

SLO 2: Basic proficiency in advocacy legal writing (M: 2)
In the Spring (RWA II), the objective is to have the students master the art of "advocacy writing." This differs from RWA II in two primary respects. First, the students are no longer able to rely upon any "canned research." For this semester, they rely almost entirely upon research they develop on their own. The research skills are those learned in both RWA I and II, as well as in Legal Bibliography, a course taught by law librarians. Second, the product the students must produce for RWA II is a legal brief. A brief is a document presented to a court for the benefit of one party to a lawsuit. Thus, unlike the memos which are intended to present objective descriptions of the law, the brief uses the current law to argue for the position of the client the lawyer represents in a lawsuit. Students are assigned to represent one side or the other.

SLO 3: Basic proficiency in oral advocacy
In the final weeks of RWA II, the objective is to have the students orally present their "advocacy writing" product in a Moot Court competition. This competition, in which all first year students in all
sections of RWA II participate against one another, utilizes upper class students, professors and practicing lawyers to sit as appellate judges and hear the students’ presentations. The key to an effective presentation is being able to answer the judges’ questions about the problem. Some questions are based solely on the students' written products, but more often they are the judges' original questions intended to probe the depths of students' understanding of the law and gauge the students’ appreciation of the consequences of a court ruling for or against their clients.

Other Outcomes/Objectives

O/O 4: xxx (M: 2)

xxx

Measures, Targets, and Findings

M 2: Production of satisfactory written product (O: 1)

Using the grading rubric in attached scoring sheets, students' memos are objectively evaluated. They are given multiple opportunities to meet with instructors and write and re-write their papers.

Source of Evidence: Evaluations

Target for O1: Basic proficiency in objective legal writing

Our target is to ensure that every single student at the College of Law acquire the proficiency described herein. While that is not possible, our more modest goal is simply to say that students who do not achieve this proficiency will not pass RWA. In fact, there is a significant correlation between those students who do not pass RWA the first time (or at least make a C) and those who do not end up graduating from the College of Law. A significant number of students who are excluded for academic reasons at the end of their first year have either failed or done very poorly in RWA.

M 2: Writing Intervention exercises (O: 1, 2, 4)

In addition to RWA, all students must also take Civil Procedure I in the Fall and Civil Procedure II in the Spring. Traditionally, these courses have both been tested and graded using one exam at the end of each semester. Especially in Civil Procedure I, the exams have been almost exclusively essay exams. Since Civil Procedure is both required and rather estoric (especially Civil Procedure I), it seems like a good course to attempt to assess and measure the degree to which students' writing skills are up to par. Picking up on that idea, two Civil Procedure professors first started using a "writing intervention" program throughout the course of the semester to see if such interventions would improve upon the skills already first learned in RWA I. In its first iteration, one professor used the intervention program, while the other did not. So as to make fair comparisons of the results in the two classes, each professor otherwise used the same syllabus and the same final exam. The intervention used in the first (experimental) year and beyond consisted of giving students five three-page, take-home papers, in addition to the final exam. The papers were designed to help students learn how to break a legal rule into its component parts, analyze and apply facts to each of the rule's elements, and make arguments on both sides. Two weeks into the semester, the intervention professor gave her students an initial single issue "practice" paper. After the students turned the paper in, the intervention professor read approximately ten papers to get a sense of the common errors and issues. Before assigning the
next paper, she reviewed the IRAC formula (issue, rule, analysis, and conclusion) with the class. She also gave students general feedback on common problems she saw in the papers she read and discussed how to avoid these problems in the future. Since that first experimental year, these methods have been incorporated into that professor's class, and they are being copied by other professors, as well.

Source of Evidence: Evaluations

**Target for O1: Basic proficiency in objective legal writing**

The goals of these writing intervention exercises are threefold. First, we want all students to become comfortable with practicing writing exercises. While the point of this practice is to succeed on examinations, such practice is good preparation for work as a practicing lawyer. Second, we want students to become comfortable with self-editing, so that they are capable of both writing good quality papers, but also improving upon them the second or later time around. Third, we want all students to write better final exams (just as they will later write better letters, memos, briefs, and all manner of legal documents) than they would write without the intervention.

**Target for O2: Basic proficiency in advocacy legal writing**

The goals of these writing intervention exercises are threefold. First, we want all students to become comfortable with practicing writing exercises. While the point of this practice is to succeed on examinations, such practice is good preparation for work as a practicing lawyer. Second, we want students to become comfortable with self-editing, so that they are capable of both writing good quality papers, but also improving upon them the second or later time around. Third, we want all students to write better final exams (just as they will later write better letters, memos, briefs, and all manner of legal documents) than they would write without the intervention.

**Target for O4: xxx**

The goal is to have all students demonstrate their proficiency in research and legal writing at the same time. This assessment is made via the "legal writing requirement," pursuant to which each student must produce one substantial paper during law school which means specific criteria for length, sophistication and quality. For every such paper, the student must submit multiple drafts to the supervising professor before turning in the final product. No student may graduate from the College of Law without satisfying this requirement.