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## Mini-Law School: Civic Education Making a Difference in the Community

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## Mini-Law School: Civic Education Making a Difference in the Community

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By Pat Newcombe and Beth D. Cohen<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT:

Western New England's Mini-Law School Program increases civic engagement and awareness and provides opportunities for law schools and educators to help non-lawyers better understand the legal system. This article will discuss the Mini-Law School Program, a creative and extremely successful five-week community outreach program focused on demystifying the law. Our society is in dire need of greater civic education. Public policy surveys consistently reveal disturbing statistics about the public's lack of civic awareness (e.g., 15 percent of the public knew that John Roberts is Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, but 66 percent could name an *American Idol* judge; 70 percent could name all Three Stooges, but barely 20 percent could name all three branches of the federal government). The need for increased civic engagement and the importance of education in this era of civic unawareness provides unique opportunities for law faculty to serve as a resource to help educate citizenry and bridge the town and gown divide. This article will describe the surprising success of Western New England's Mini-Law School Program, an interactive lecture and

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discussion series focused on providing opportunities for participants to learn about different areas of the law and legal system. The authors provide details of the collaborative endeavor so that others may launch similar Mini-Law School programs in their own communities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education. – Franklin D. Roosevelt<sup>2</sup>

The innovative Mini-Law School Program at Western New England University School of Law is one effort to help increase the educational level and civic knowledge among our citizenry. According to the Model Rules of Professional Conduct, “a lawyer should further the public’s understanding of, and confidence in, the rule of law and the justice system because legal institutions in a constitutional democracy depend on popular participation and support to maintain their authority.”<sup>3</sup>

This article first addresses the deficiencies in civic education and the need to increase opportunities for learning about the law. The article next explores the Model Rules of Professional Conduct as an incentive to include civic education as part of a lawyer’s pro bono service. The article then details community programming at one law school that can serve as a model for other institutions. The more that schools commit to increasing civic education beyond the classroom, the greater the impact and benefit to the preservation of democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> Leaders throughout U.S. history have emphasized the importance of civic education. *E.g.*, “An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.” Often attributed to Thomas Jefferson, <https://www.monticello.org>; “There’s nothing that will take us down sooner as a nation than a nation of young people who don’t understand the justice system.” Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, *THE ALA. LAW.*, Sept. 2010, at 336. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15545>

<sup>3</sup> Model Rules Of Prof’l Conduct Preamble. 6 (AM. BAR ASS’N 2016)

## II. CIVIC EDUCATION

The need for increased civic engagement and the importance of civic education has been touted by, among others, the American Bar Association,<sup>4</sup> Supreme Court justices,<sup>5</sup> and public policy centers.<sup>6</sup> For example, “[i]n 2009, at the American Bar Association (ABA) Annual Meeting, Justice David Souter urged the Association to strengthen its commitment to improving civic education in the nation’s schools.”<sup>7</sup>

As evidenced by recent public dialogue, we are faced with some disturbing statistics regarding the lack of civic knowledge and awareness. In fact, one survey actually revealed that “[w]hile little more than a third of respondents (36 percent) could name all three branches of the U.S. government, just as many (35 percent) could not name a single one.”<sup>8</sup> Fifteen percent of those surveyed knew that John Roberts is the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.<sup>9</sup> However, in contrast, 66 percent could name one of the judges on the panel of *American Idol*,<sup>10</sup> and more than 70 percent of Americans could name all three of the Three Stooges.<sup>11</sup>

Although the need for civic education is evident in surveys and general public discourse, civic education is not prioritized in most educational

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<sup>4</sup> *Commission on Civic Education in the Nation’s Schools*, AM. BAR ASS’N, <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/civics.html> [https://perma.cc/CDA2-D8KH] (last visited Oct. 8, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Letitia N. Chafin, *Why West Virginia Lawyers Should Support and Participate in Civic Education*, W. VA. L. 6 (2010).

<sup>6</sup> *Americans Know Surprisingly Little about Their Government*, ANNENBERG PUB. POL’Y CTR. (Sept. 17, 2014), [www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-know-surprisingly-little-about-their-government-survey-finds/](http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-know-surprisingly-little-about-their-government-survey-finds/) [https://perma.cc/4274-7SUJ].

<sup>7</sup> Chafin, *supra* note 5.

<sup>8</sup> Annenberg Public Policy Center, *supra* note 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Chafin *supra* note 5 (citing a 2007 Annenberg Public Policy survey entitled *Public Understanding and Support for the Courts*).

<sup>11</sup> Bob Kerrey, *Becoming Aware of Civic Unawareness*, HUFFINGTON POST (May 26, 2012), [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-kerrey/civic-education\\_b\\_1519037.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-kerrey/civic-education_b_1519037.html) [https://perma.cc/T2A5-N7X3].

environments.<sup>12</sup> Due to budget cuts, standardized testing, and changing priorities leading schools to focus on other subject areas, civic education receives less emphasis in today's schools and communities, prompting some to observe that, as a society, "we cannot leave law-related civic education entirely up to the public school system."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, in this era of civic unawareness, a time when both the legal profession and law schools are struggling with budgetary and industry-wide challenges,<sup>14</sup> the Model Rules of Professional Conduct provide an added incentive to create opportunities to strengthen connections with the community as an educational resource.

### III. MODEL RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

The Model Rules of Profession Conduct ("Model Rules") state that "[a] lawyer, as a member of the legal profession, is . . . a public citizen having special responsibility for the quality of justice."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the Model Rules provide that "a lawyer should further the public's understanding of and confidence in the rule of law and the justice system because legal institutions in a constitutional democracy depend on popular participation and support to maintain their authority."<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the Model Rules suggest that each lawyer aspire to perform fifty hours of pro bono legal services per year. Civic education programs provide an opportunity for faculty to work toward achieving this goal. Law faculty have a responsibility to share their knowledge about civics and are uniquely situated to further civic education based on their education and experience.

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<sup>12</sup> ATT'YS FOR CIVIC EDUC., <http://www.attorneysforciviceducation.org> [https://perma.cc/94S2-TYU8] (last visited Dec. 9, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Don Burnett, *Civic Education, the Rule of Law, and the Judiciary: "A Republic...If you can Keep it,"* 58 ADVOCATE 26, 28 (2015).

<sup>14</sup> See generally PAUL A. HASKINS, THE RELEVANT LAWYER: REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION (Paul Haskins, ed., American Bar Association 2015).

<sup>15</sup> MODEL RULES OF PROF'L CONDUCT, *supra* note 3,

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

Law faculty and law schools can help meet the need to advance the public's understanding of government, the justice system, and the rule of law.

#### IV. COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS AT WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

As the only law school in the region,<sup>17</sup> Western New England University School of Law (School of Law), like many law schools, has long played an important role in the local legal community. In addition to serving the legal needs of the community through clinics, externships, and pro bono activities, the law school hosts many programs that welcome the surrounding community into the law school. From hosting appellate court sessions and naturalization ceremonies for new citizens, and inviting the public to participate in public lectures and conferences, the School of Law provides a platform for residents to observe and engage with the legal process. These programs benefit both the community and the law school. Citizens are able to view the law in action, in real time, observing real judges and lawyers. Making these opportunities accessible to the community helps bridge the gap between the theory of law and the real impact of law on people's lives. For example, anecdotally, people who observe the naturalization ceremonies at the School of Law report that they appreciate how meaningful the proceedings are to everyone involved. This impact seems even more significant as immigration has become such a divisive issue. Additionally, the public lectures, open to the community free of charge, present another opportunity for members of the community to learn about cutting-edge legal issues from legal scholars. Viewing the School of Law's connection with the community as a vital part of its mission, the authors believe that it is incumbent upon us to look for new ways to enhance our connections with, and service to, the community.

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<sup>17</sup> This project would also work well as a collaborative project for multiple law schools in the same geographic area. Law schools could join forces and spread the resources to create a successful Mini Law School Program.

## V. PRO BONO REQUIREMENT AT WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

In 2012, Western New England School of Law adopted a pro bono requirement for both students and faculty.<sup>18</sup> The pro bono policy increased the institutional support for community collaborations beyond the traditional model of student externships and clinical programs.<sup>19</sup> During the past few years, the School of Law has undertaken several collaborative civic education projects such as partnerships with various constituencies including the Supreme Judicial Court, Bar Associations, private corporations, non-profits, and local schools to establish programs that serve underserved youth populations.<sup>20</sup> These programs, geared toward students,

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<sup>18</sup> “Western New England University School of Law has long been committed to principles of public service and professional education in preparation for the practice of law. The School of Law seeks to train students to enter into a profession in which pro bono service is highly valued, instilling the principle that members of the legal community and those aspiring to enter the legal profession have an obligation to assist in providing legal services to persons of limited means. In the spring of 2011, the faculty of WNE Law acknowledged the importance of this service by adopting a pro bono graduation requirement. In order to graduate, students must complete 20 hours of pro bono service. Pro bono service is uncompensated. Pro bono service is defined as the provision of law-related services to: (1) persons of limited means. 2) charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters which are designed primarily to address the needs of persons of limited means. (3) individuals, groups or organizations seeking to secure or protect civil rights, civil liberties or public rights. (4) charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental or educational organizations in matters in furtherance of their organizational purposes, where the payment of standard legal fees would significantly deplete the organization's economic resources. Pro bono service also includes: (5) activities for improving access to the law, improving the legal system or improving the legal profession. (6) educational activities for improving the public's understanding of the law, the legal system or the legal profession."Faculty report their pro bono hours and activities in their annual end-of-the-year review. *Pro Bono Requirements*, WNE SCHOOL OF LAW (April 1, 2018), <http://www1.wne.edu/law/registrar/pro-bono-requirement.cfm> [https://perma.cc/P82X-BXTQ]

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> For example, the School of Law has partnered with the Massachusetts and Supreme Judicial Court and Massachusetts Bar Association to help expand the Judicial Youth Corp

provide an important link between the School of Law and the community, and increase civic education at the youth level.

Although the School of Law reaches out to the community in many other ways, in 2015 the authors took community outreach and civic engagement efforts to a new level by offering a five-week Mini-Law School Program<sup>21</sup> designed specifically to help non-lawyers develop a deeper knowledge of the law and key legal topics that impact their everyday lives.<sup>22</sup> The newly created Mini-Law School Program is geared toward a broad demographic and continues the mission of helping to provide opportunities for civic education and an understanding of the law.<sup>23</sup> The Mini-Law School Program has been a resounding success, and we welcome the opportunity to share the experience and model of the program with others so that efforts to

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Program, a summer education and internship program designed to introduce high school students to the inner workings of the courts and justice system. The School of Law also partnered with the nearby Duggan Middle School and the Discovering Justice Program to educate students in a program that culminates in a moot court trial presided over by a federal judge. These partnerships have led to increased collaborations to provide additional after-school programs and in-school enrichment programs as well as other programs. See *John J. Duggan Academy, an Expeditionary Learning Magnet School with a Social Justice Theme*, SPRINGFIELD PUB. SCH., <http://www.springfieldpublicschools.com/schools/john-j-duggan-academy> (last visited Dec. 9, 2016) [https://perma.cc/V7C7-73VP]; DISCOVERING JUSTICE, [www.discoveringjustice.org](http://www.discoveringjustice.org) [https://perma.cc/QQ3N-WUE4] (last visited Dec. 9, 2016) (an organization with a mission “to prepare young people to value the justice system, realize the power of their own voices, and embrace civic responsibility by connecting classrooms and courtrooms”); JUST THE BEGINNING, [www.jtb.org](http://www.jtb.org) [https://perma.cc/J2A6-XZEC] (last visited Dec. 9, 2016) (a pipeline organization with a mission “to encourage and foster student academic goal setting and success with a focus on the legal profession and the continued expansion of all-encompassing diversity within the legal field”); *Judicial Youth Corps Program*, COMMONWEALTH MASS., <http://www.mass.gov/courts/court-info/sjc/edu-res-center/judicial-youth-corps-program.html> [https://perma.cc/CK9Q-6BKB] (last visited Sept. 7, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Similarly, a local hospital offers a long-standing Mini-Medical School Program that provides health education for the general public. *Mini-Medical School*, BAYSTATE HEALTH, <https://www.baystatehealth.org/about-us/community-programs/education-training/mini-medical-school> [https://perma.cc/DL4A-STL8] (last visited Oct. 8, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> *Mini-Law School*, WNE SCH. L., <http://www1.wne.edu/law/mini-law-school.cfm> [https://perma.cc/6S5H-7E3U] (last visited Nov. 2, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*



increase civic engagement and knowledge can increase on a wider scale throughout the country.

## VI. MINI-LAW SCHOOL PROGRAM AT WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW – NUTS AND BOLTS

### *A. The Mini-Law School Program Mission*

The Mini-Law School Program was designed to provide practical knowledge to assist people in understanding how laws are applied, why disputes occur so frequently, and how courts mediate this process.<sup>24</sup> As we live in an increasingly complex world filled with laws and regulations, people want to become better informed in order to make wiser decisions. Additionally, understanding the fundamentals of our legal system helps people grapple with the many legal issues that dominate the news. This was our starting point in 2014, when we chose to create the Mini-Law School Program. Our goal was to increase civic engagement and awareness and provide opportunities for people to better understand the legal system. At first, we considered partnering with local bar associations and including local attorneys and a faculty member in each session. However, we ultimately decided that it would be more educational to partner with a federal magistrate judge who serves as “dean” of the Mini-Law School. The judge, now retired, moderates each session, presented by a law school faculty member, providing continuity and context for each topic and session. Also, the judge provides invaluable insight on the legal issues addressed in each session.

In order to keep the focus on education rather than risk becoming a legal advice clinic, participants were informed that the organizers and presenters for Mini-Law School would not answer any specific personal legal questions. Participants were provided a handout at the first class with a list of sources for accessing legal information, including local bar associations,

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<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

Dial-A-Lawyer services, and state trial court self-help sources. We also announced the policy in our first class, thus preemptively avoiding conflict.

*B. The Mini-Law School Program Structure*

When the authors set out to plan and organize the first Mini-Law School Program, our expectations were modest. Originally, the goal was to have a class of at least fifteen to twenty people, but due to the overwhelming response, we needed to move the program to the largest lecture hall on campus. So far, there have been three Mini-Law School Program sessions. With minimal advertising, the Mini-Law School Program drew 200 registrants and a wait list of 150 people. It is worth noting that the first program was scheduled during a severe New England winter in a relatively small city; nonetheless, despite the cold and snow, there was nearly full attendance each week.

Classes met one evening per week from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The two-hour class sessions seemed sufficient to discuss the concepts introduced by each faculty member. The classes generally had a lecture period during which the faculty member discussed the topic and then provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions during or after the lecture. We chose topics of general interest, such as family law, criminal law, and health law, that we thought would hold the public's interest. Additionally, we sought out our law faculty to serve as speakers, since they are uniquely qualified to serve as resources to participants and to reinforce the law school's commitment to the community.<sup>25</sup>

Each of the three Mini-Law School Programs that we have held thus far began with an introductory class to provide a detailed overview of the U.S. legal system and the courts. This helped level the playing field for all participants, which was necessary due to the diversity and demographics of

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen M. Johnson, *Using Technology to Educate the Public*, 50 J. LEG. EDUC. 393, 394 (2000).

the participants.<sup>26</sup> Registrants of the Mini Law School Program ranged from high school age to senior citizens, all with a wide variety of education and employment backgrounds.<sup>27</sup> Among the varied participants were doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, students, and parents of current or former law students.<sup>28</sup> Some high school and college students were interested in possibly pursuing law or a law-related field, but most participants simply wanted to further their general understanding of the law.<sup>29</sup> Many of the seniors and retirees valued the opportunity to engage in stimulating discussions about thought-provoking topics.<sup>30</sup>

### *C. The Mini-Law School Program Curriculum*

The first two Mini-Law School Programs were deliberately structured to be broad in scope. The first Mini-Law School Program, in spring 2015, began with an introductory session, *An Inside View of Law School and the Courts*,<sup>31</sup> and continued with four sessions including: *Family Law: What Defines a Family?*;<sup>32</sup> *Health Law: End of Life Choices*;<sup>33</sup> *Constitutional*

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<sup>26</sup> Registration materials on file with authors.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> Program evaluations on file with authors.

<sup>31</sup> Dean Eric Gouvin, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Welcome to Mini-Law School: An Inside View of Law School and the Courts (Feb. 10, 2014). Everyone has heard the expression “thinking like a lawyer,” but what does that really mean? Do lawyers think differently? If so, how so? This class will explore some of the ways that lawyers look at the world and the methodology they apply to legal problems. It may turn out that lawyers do, indeed, see the world differently. On the other hand, maybe they don’t.

Judge Kenneth Neiman: Why the robe? How courts are structured, how judges make decisions, and what that means for you. A view from the bench.

<sup>32</sup> Jennifer Levi, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Family Law: What Defines a Family? (Feb. 17, 2014). Nearly 15 years ago in a case challenging the right of a grandparent to visit with a grandchild over the objection of a parent, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor wrote, “The demographic changes of the past century make it difficult to speak of an average American family.” The traditional markers of family have been birth, marriage, and adoption. With the advent of alternative reproductive technologies and the elimination of marriage barriers for same-sex couples,

*Law: Real Law or Just Another Kind of Politics?*,<sup>34</sup> and *Environmental Law: Legal Solutions to Pollution Challenges*.<sup>35</sup> The second Mini-Law School Program took place during fall 2015 and also began with an introductory session, *An Inside View of Law School and the Courts*, and continued with four sessions including: *The Law of Federal Income Taxes: Does It Have to Be So Complicated?*,<sup>36</sup> *Criminal Law: Search and Seizure*

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contemporary law has had to revise standards for determining family relationships especially those that relate to parents and children. Against a backdrop of changing family dynamics, this session will focus on the legal meaning of family and seek to answer important questions, such as who is a parent and what is the meaning of marriage.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Noah, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Health Law: End of Life Choices (Feb. 24, 2014). This session will introduce the variety of advance care planning documents available to direct medical care in the event of a serious illness or injury. Only approximately 25% of adults have engaged in any kind of advance care planning and even older adults tend to delay this process. Physicians, like their patients, frequently avoid conversations about end of life planning, resulting in a default continuation of medical care, including life-sustaining treatment. This session will look at the legal and cultural context in which end of life decisions are made and will consider ways to improve the decision-making process for patients, families, and physicians.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce Miller, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Constitutional Law: Real Law or Just Another Kind of Politics? (Mar. 3, 2014) Our written Constitution is the Supreme Law of the Land. But what does this mean in practice? Does Constitutional Law stand above politics? If it does, why are Supreme Court nominations so contentious and why are so many of the Court's cases decided by a 5-4 vote? If it doesn't, are the Justices any more than politicians in robes, using the neutral discourse of law to mask the imposition of their decidedly non-neutral values on the rest of us? These are some of the questions we will take up in this session on the role of politics in Constitutional interpretation.

<sup>35</sup> Julie Steiner, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Environmental Law: Legal Solutions to Pollution Challenges, (Mar. 10, 2014). This session will focus on how citizens influence environmental outcomes. Citizens can be a powerful shaping force in environmental regulation. Learn how "citizen suit" provisions and laws like the National Environmental Policy Act facilitate grassroots environmental activism.

<sup>36</sup> William Metzger, The Law of Federal Income Taxes: Does It Have to Be So Complicated? This session will explore the goals of the drafters of our Federal Income Tax system and the reasons those goals have not been achieved. Should the system be designed to raise revenue only, or should it be utilized to accomplish other governmental purposes? Can the system do both and still be true to its goals?

*Law*;<sup>37</sup> *National Security and Civil Liberties: Surveillance and Democracy*;<sup>38</sup> and *Challenging Inequality in the Workplace: An Overview of Employment Discrimination Protections*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bridgette Baldwin, Criminal Law: Search and Seizure Law Almost two years ago Judge Shira A. Schiendlin, of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, declared NYPD's Stop, Question, and Frisk policy unconstitutional. She denounced the policy discriminatory, violating the Fourth and Fifteenth Amendments. Urban and civil liberties activists bolstered her decision with the humbling fact that over 80% of people stopped are Black and Latino, while 9 out of 10 are found innocent and only 2% of all stops yield any form of contraband. Still, before, during, and after the trial, the NYPD argued that the policy does not profile race, it profiles criminals and ultimately saves lives. A recent news report argued that the drop in the policy has emboldened criminals and may be a cause of recent spikes in NYC crime. Whichever side of the law you fall on when it comes to Stop, Question, and Frisk its implementation and dangers remain central to any current discussion of criminal law. In this discussion we will examine the context of its development, the process of its implementation, the legal arguments for its abolishment, and finally its legacy. Even in its currently unconstitutional state; Stop, Question, and Frisk continues to shape our examinations of crime, policing, and the law.

<sup>38</sup> Sudha Setty, *National Security and Civil Liberties: Surveillance and Democracy*. In June 2013 and in the months and years following, the public learned from former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden more about the extent to which the U.S. government collects huge amounts of data and conducts surveillance on both U.S. citizens and foreigners. What are the justifications that the government provides for that kind of surveillance? Did we, as citizens in a democratic nation, have a right to know about those programs without Snowden leaking that information? Does the public knowing about those surveillance programs jeopardize our national security? Are there ways in which Congress, the courts, and the public should play a meaningful role in determining the limits of this kind of surveillance, or is that an unrealistic expectation? In this session, we'll discuss these difficult and complicated questions that involve our security, our freedoms, and the role of the people in a democratic government.

<sup>39</sup> Erin Buzuvis, *Challenging Inequality in the Workplace: An Overview of Employment Discrimination Protections*: Most Americans spend much of their lives in the workplace. Employment provides workers not only financial security and essential benefits, it also bestows on many workers a sense of purpose and important personal relationships. For these reasons, inequality in the workplace – whether it be excluding certain workers from certain jobs, treating or paying them differently, retaliating against workers who challenge inequality, or harassing or allowing a hostile environment to persist – presents a compelling problem and one that legislatures and courts continue to address. Using problems based on actual cases, this session will introduce participants to legal protections against workplace discrimination based on such protected characteristics as race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, national origin, and family status.

For the third program, we experimented with a subject-specific focus. We were asked by School of Law's Center for Gender & Sexuality Studies faculty to coordinate a Mini-Law School Program on Gender & Sexuality Law.<sup>40</sup> The third Mini-Law School Program took place during spring 2016 and included the following topics, all within the focus of gender and sexuality: *Introduction to the Legal System, Professionalism and Cultural Competency*,<sup>41</sup> *Sex Discrimination and LGBT Civil Rights in Education*,<sup>42</sup> *Issues in Criminal Law*,<sup>43</sup> and *Issues in Family Law*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Established in 2012, the Center for Gender & Sexuality Studies is a resource for students, alumni, and faculty of Western New England University School of Law, the legal community, and the general public. The Center serves as a focal point for work in a broad number of areas relating to gender and sexuality, ranging from civil rights issues affecting women and sexual minorities to feminist and queer theory. The Center works to engage with the legal community, with the University, and with members of the School of Law on core issues of gender and sexuality across a broad spectrum of law, including criminal law, immigration, employment, family law, health law, discrimination, prisoners' rights, legislation, leadership and business, and international and comparative law. *Center for Gender & Sexuality Studies*, WNE SCHOOL OF LAW, <http://www1.wne.edu/law/centers/gender-and-sexuality-studies.cfm> [<https://perma.cc/YAT9-EAVC>] (last visited Oct. 8).

<sup>41</sup> Harris Freeman & Jennifer Levi, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Gender and Sexuality Issues: Introduction to the Legal System (Apr. 12, 2014), <http://www1.wne.edu/news/2016/02/mini-law-school.cfm> [<https://perma.cc/H9CQ-AMJQ>]. This session will introduce students to the American legal system in ways that are relevant to understanding the law's relationship to gender and sexuality issues. Students will learn about the courts and the common law system, the structure and interrelationship of state and federal government, the Constitution's protection for individual rights, and other foundational matters.

<sup>42</sup> Erin Buzuvis & Jennifer Levi, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Gender and Sexuality Law: Professionalism and Cultural Competency (Apr. 19, 2014), <http://www1.wne.edu/news/2016/02/mini-law-school.cfm> [<https://perma.cc/P5JT-S3AF>]. In this session, participants explore guidelines and best practices for making a range of professional environments open, welcome, and affirming of LGBTQI clients and communities. The session will focus on the legal frameworks that drive guidelines and best practices with a focus on professional environments including: schools, businesses, and health care facilities, among others.

<sup>43</sup> Bridgette Baldwin, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Gender and Sexuality Issues in Criminal Law (May 3, 2014), <http://www1.wne.edu/news/2016/02/mini-law-school.cfm>. What happens when gender and sexuality intersect with criminal law? Through relevant case law we will examine a range of themes from the unequal policing of same-sex partner violence and sex work to

We were able to offer continuing education credits for alcohol counselors, educators, and social workers for the Gender & Sexuality Mini-Law School. In addition to providing more depth and detail in a concentrated subject area, this approach helped us gauge the local interest in becoming more engaged with the law school's Center for Gender and Sexuality Studies. Although this Mini-Law School Program had a narrow focus compared to the two prior programs, we were still able to attract 100 registrants.

#### *D. The Mini-Law School Program Costs*

Because we wanted to make the program accessible to as many people as possible, we limited the cost to a modest thirty-five dollars for all sessions. Although the first two programs included the option of free registration for students, the authors determined that when students paid a nominal registration fee, their overall attendance improved. The costs to provide the Mini-Law School Program have been minimal, and the Program has been self-sustaining. For each program, the only expenses incurred were costs associated with photocopying; supplies, such as folders for handouts and certificates for those who completed the program; pens branded with the

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the legal quagmire of incarcerating transgender inmates and the gender/sexual contours of the larger "prison pipeline" phenomenon. Making case law account for the dynamic nature in which we live our sexual and gendered lives is at the cutting edge of criminal legal studies.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor Flynn, Addresses at the Western New England University School of Law, Gender and Sexuality Issues in Family Law (May 10, 2014), <http://www1.wne.edu/news/2016/02/mini-law-school.cfm>. This session will focus on the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, that individuals have the constitutional right to marry a person of the same sex. We will discuss the reach of the Court's decision, including its protection of marital rights and duties for not only gay men, bisexuals and lesbians, but also for couples where one or both spouses are transgender. We will consider the impact the ruling may have on issues including adoption, child custody, and marital property. We will also discuss the competing claims of businesses and individuals that seek exemption on religious liberty grounds from complying with anti-discrimination laws, such as bakers who refuse to sell wedding cakes to same-sex couples.

School of Law name and logo; and pocket Constitutions that were greatly appreciated by the participants. We also distributed Mini-Law School t-shirts at the last session of each Mini-Law School Program, a small gesture of good will as well as a good marketing opportunity.

#### *E. The Mini-Law School Program Evaluations*

We conduct an evaluation after each class; participants generally rate speakers and topics “excellent” (the highest possible rating) and the information provided as “extremely valuable.” In fact, many participants express the desire for longer sessions. Although the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, there were, of course, a few challenges. First, some of the more controversial topics resulted in somewhat heated exchanges and dissatisfaction among the audience with respect to the different views expressed. Second, on a few occasions, a small group of audience members interrupted the speaker repeatedly to voice their personal and political agenda. Although these disruptions were challenging, and uncomfortable, particularly given the size of the audience, appropriate classroom management techniques proved effective to keep the sessions on track.

As administrators of the Mini-Law School Program, it has been reinvigorating to work with a new, diverse population and to be part of a broad outreach effort to improve civic knowledge. Participating faculty have also benefited from teaching to a different audience, further honing their teaching skills as they reach beyond their usual teaching environment and engage with a broader base.

#### VII. CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED

Based on the authors’ experience with the Mini-Law School Program, community members are interested in the demystification of law.<sup>45</sup> We live

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<sup>45</sup> Course evaluations on file with authors.



in an increasingly complex world with law impacting our daily lives in critical, fundamental ways. People want to understand our laws, how they work, and their purpose; they want to be better informed in order to make better decisions. With the widespread use of the Internet, people are accustomed to accessing information to expand their knowledge base. However, even the well informed may feel law is inscrutable. By expanding the reach of civic education provided by law schools, we can provide participants with a better understanding of critical legal principles in various areas of the law.

Moreover, the public is interested in lifelong learning opportunities, and there are limited opportunities to learn about the legal system in a continuing education setting. This vacuum provides an opportunity for law schools and lawyers to help educate our citizenry. We feel it is our obligation to do so. Participants come away with a better understanding of what lawyers do and the law school educational process. For some participants, there is the added benefit of getting a glimpse at whether they might like to attend law school.

Lawyers have a longstanding image problem based upon a misunderstanding or lack of awareness of how a lawyer's work could be relevant to an individual's daily life. The same could be said for our courts, since media coverage of only high profile or unusual cases leaves the ordinary administration of justice largely unreported. Fortunately, Mini-Law School can bridge the gap while also providing excellent public relations for our profession. If the public develops a keener understanding of the law and basic legal principles, they may view lawyers and courts in a more positive light.

"Law schools hold significant intrinsic reputational value that goes wasted when they fail to bridge this public education gap."<sup>46</sup> We can make a

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<sup>46</sup> Renee Newman Knake, *Democratizing Legal Education*, 45 CONN. L. REV. 1281, 1316 (2013).

difference. Although educating the general public has not traditionally been a primary responsibility of law professors, we have the expertise and flexibility to dedicate sufficient time to these lectures.<sup>47</sup> At Western New England University School of Law, faculty have a pro bono requirement that can be satisfied with this educational project, serving the public good.<sup>48</sup> By disseminating information, faculty “can play a major role in equalizing access to justice.”<sup>49</sup> Also, because public education is part of a lawyer’s professional and civic duty,<sup>50</sup> a faculty member’s involvement in Mini-Law School sets an excellent example for our law students about the responsibilities of their future roles as attorneys.

Social science literature suggests that the more knowledge citizens have about our legal and court systems, the more positively they feel about the integrity and value of these systems.<sup>51</sup> If we all act together, law schools could have a powerful influence on the public’s knowledge and awareness of the law and the legal process. Perhaps even a few law schools acting independently can make a difference. We are happy to share information with others interested in pursuing a similar program.

The unique structure of the Mini-Law School Program epitomizes the collaborative process at its best by “synthesiz[ing] participants’ contributions to achieve a better product than any of them could have developed on their own.”<sup>52</sup> It is our hope that this article will provide a model for law schools and educators interested in increasing collaborative efforts, civic education and engagement, and community outreach.

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<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> See Pro Bono Policy, *supra* note 17.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen M. Johnson, *Using Technology to Educate the Public*, 50 J. LEGAL EDUC. 393, 396 (2000).

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> Don Burnett, *Civic Education, the Rule of Law, and the Judiciary: “A Republic...If you can Keep it,”* 58 Feb. ADVOCATE 26, 27 (2015).

<sup>52</sup> Susan Bryant, *Collaboration in Law Practice: A Satisfying and Productive Process for a Diverse Profession*, 17 VT. L. REV. 459, 499 (1993).