

writers refine and hone their work. The coursework is an opportunity for students to practice this and students indicated in their feedback that they found this particularly useful.

In terms of future assessments, it would be interesting to build some oral advocacy into the course, perhaps by encouraging students to participate in a moot.

When we began teaching this course, we discovered a perception amongst students (and some academic staff) that this was a 'soft' option: 'sitting around and talking about books and films', as one student put it. The feedback from students has been that the course has instead been challenging, not only in terms of the workload but also in that it has also required them to think, develop arguments and form an opinion of their own.

The general consensus is that the course gives students the opportunity to reflect on the wider issues surrounding the legal process and the business of 'lawyering' generally.

Without exception, students felt that the workshops were of particular benefit in providing a genuine arena for group discussion and debate – something which was less easy to do in the black-letter core subjects. For some students, the course was seen as a definite 'morale booster' in building confidence and self-esteem: 'It made me more confident about expressing my opinions in class.' Interestingly, many students were quite open about how uneasy they felt about participating in seminar discussions in the core law subjects for fear of 'getting it wrong' and looking foolish in front of their peer group. One of the recurring comments on the feedback form was that, unlike many of the substantive law courses, there were no right or wrong answers in group discussions. Students enjoyed sharing – and defending – their point of view. They thus assimilated an essential legal skill without even realising it!

Students enjoyed the range of films and texts, many commenting that they were required to read books that they would otherwise probably not have read at all. A number of students felt a real sense of achievement simply by persevering and reaching the end of *Bleak House* or *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Developing an ability to persevere with difficult texts and concepts is, of course, a skill that all lawyers require in order to perform their duties well.

Most students were also very supportive of the method of assessment, in particular, the opportunity to select their own essay topic, which enabled them to develop their own particular areas of interest and explore aspects of a film (or films) that had not been considered in the mainstream sources.

Student feedback has also suggested extending certain aspects of the course to first year students as part of their introduction to legal education and the law curriculum. In particular, films such as *The Paper Chase* (1970) and *Legally Blonde* (2001) are identified as providing opportunities for students to examine their preconceptions of the law school environment against the popular portrayal of law teachers and students in film. Interestingly, both films were criticised by students for perpetuating myths and stereotypes that may adversely influence career choices among university applicants. This year, we were fortunate enough to be able to screen *A Civil Action* (1999) to the first-year students as part of their induction programme at the beginning of the academic year. We then held a workshop as part of their introductory Legal Method classes asking them to reflect on various issues raised by the film.

Recently, we approached a small number of graduates among the first cohort of Law Through Film and Literature students to discover whether the course had had any continuing impact on them as they take the first steps into legal practice. All of the respondents continued to profess that the course had been interesting and useful to them: 'it broadened my thinking'; 'I really enjoyed the course and found it interesting'; 'it adds variety to the LLB course'; 'it has assisted both with my oral and written expression'; 'it helped me to read more, argue constructively and write more'.

The importance of providing law students with a broader and more far-reaching legal curriculum has already been highlighted by a number of academics, most notably, Guy Osborn in his influential article, 'Borders and Boundaries: Locating the Law in Film'. Above all, the course has enabled students to improve their abilities to analyse and communicate effectively within a legal discipline. This is to be welcomed at all levels.

Legal Writing

Lisa Webley

Routledge-Cavendish, 2010, 151 pp

This is the second edition of a book first published in 2005. It is unique in that it is written by an English academic in a field which until recently was dominated by North American authors. In fact the topic of Legal Writing is very much an integral part of American legal studies, recognised as

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forming a basic foundation of legal education in the USA but a neglected form of the curriculum in most other Common Law Jurisdictions.

In the Introduction the author reminds the reader of the importance to lawyers of effective communication, but: 'that law degrees in the UK, in contrast to their US cousins rarely focus on writing skills.'

This view was emphasised in an article by Professor John Sexton, who was then the Dean of the NYU Law School in their Law School Magazine's Autumn 2000 Edition. In this article, which was a report of Professor Sexton's keynote address to the American Bar Association's Conference in August of that year, he spoke of the: 'the lawyer's task to communicate – whether by writing a contract, or making an oral argument, or advising a client. Lawyering is about words, and meaning, and communication, and understanding. Regulatory interpretation or statutory analysis is about words, and meaning, and communication, and understanding.'

Although the text concentrates mainly on how to deal with writing tasks with which the law student is faced during University law studies, Lisa Webley does focus in a similar fashion to John Sexton's delivery in respect of: 'Excellent written work is a culmination of a number of factors coming together. It is a product of a good written style that communicates the ideas in the right way to the relevant audience. Excellent written work focuses on the main issues that have been raised by the question or scenario.' The author emphasizes that the student needs to ensure that such written work 'culminates in a well-considered conclusion that sums up the analysis that you have provided, as a final answer to the question. But it does help for the writer to understand what they are trying to communicate, to what end and to whom.'

In the nine chapters which compose the text, the author covers all the types of written tasks incorporated into the normal law curriculum, specifically during the early part of the law program. These include dealing with the nature of various examining methods, such as assignments, problem questions, essays, dissertations and the answering of examination questions. The text also incorporates explanations of the various methods of referencing and thereby assists the student in avoiding committing any form of plagiarism.

The book contains all the appropriate forms of layout with regard to summaries, flow charts, and helpful inserts with the use of a contrasting colour, to ensure that it is an effective method of assisting the student.

There is a helpful section described as 'Answers to Questions.' However this is very much an understatement in that it contains some excellent analysis of specimen extracts which will encourage the law student to develop a high level of self-confidence when applying the skills which they will have acquired by reading and applying themselves to the earlier part of the book. In addition there is a useful bibliography and index.

The book is also supported by a new companion website which incorporates a number of online resources expanding on much of the matters raised in the body of the text including multiple choice questions relating to correct referencing.

There is much to commend this book particularly with regard to the fact that the author has attempted to create a text which will hold the student's interest, arouse their enthusiasm, and encourage them to develop their own style of writing.

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