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Bringing Legal Studies into Life with Web-Based Projects

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Legal studies can sometimes involve abstract, esoteric subject matters, dry and devoid of life and flesh (i.e., the lived substance of human beings). The Rule Against Perpetuities, for example, is rarely taught as a primary means of distributing and denying inheritance, wealth, and resources. Sex trafficking, by contrast, exists on a continuum of sexualized harassment to sexual assault. Sex trafficking, as a legal field of study, provides a vehicle or template for understanding social justice and redistributions of power. It asks the question: How can the legal system eradicate sexual violence (generally) and sex trafficking (specifically)? It is an area of concentration that provides much needed flesh and a recognition of humanity in places that remain largely invisible – the precarious places of the societally vulnerable—the poor, women, persons of color, and LGBTQIA populations. Most importantly, sex trafficking as a field of study, can provide a space for survivors of sexual violence to explore and find their voices. It can enable them to turn their insights, courage, and fortitude into advocacy for themselves and others. It is a place to turn pain into passion, politics, and a profession.

I designed my sex trafficking class to grab students in the viscera—the place where one cries and suffers. Education requires pathos. At the same time, my students must understand the practicalities of criminal procedure—the administrative processing of criminal conduct. The seminar is designed to bring to life legal studies, particularly understanding how the criminal process can address matters

of sexualized suffering. Within that process, it is a place for everyone to draw from their pain in order to navigate their burgeoning professional career.

In order to expand a platform for learning, educating, and sharing, I built a website with my seminar students. The webspace provides an opportunity where students can share imaginative expressions of their voice, whether it is blogging, TikTok videos, memes, interviews, or panel discussions (stylized like *The View*). Our webspace is a place to bring legal studies into life—the flesh of pain, pathos, passion, politics, and practice. Students have an opportunity to interview practitioners and prosecutors in the field of sex trafficking, journalists who write about sexualized violence, and any other (wildly) imaginative project that addresses sexualized violations. Pedagogical methods are increasingly recognizing different methods of learning, e.g., visual, kinesthetic, and spatial. The website invites knowledge production from any and every medium; thereby democratizing the space for different learners, presentation styles, and modes of communication.

The seminar and website fulfill a pressing need: Gendered student demographics are radically changing around the nation. Now, more than ever before, there are more women and LGBTQIA populations in law schools. These populations make up disproportionate numbers of sexualized violence victims. Historically, the underrepresentation of sexualized violence victims in colleges and law schools has led to a dearth of subject matter concerning rape and sexual assault. As a result, under prosecutions and inattentiveness to sexualized violence is an outgrowth of power and control in institutions of higher learning. Because more and more victims of sexualized violence are populating the halls of the academy, institutions of higher learning are witnessing an increased interest in sexualized violence prevention as more vulnerable populations find their voice, agency, and power. Both the seminar and website are an effort to step into the gap in order to assist students in finding their calling and to aid them in concretizing their studies in the lived realities of sexualized violence.

On February 5, 2021, the University of Kentucky J. David Rosenberg College of Law, grateful steward of the community it serves, held a symposium for students, practitioners, stakeholders, and the public. The symposium, the first of its kind, examined the converging and rising tides of sex trafficking vulnerability and opioid dependency. A Rosenberg student moderated each panel during the symposium. The website provided a space for the students to upload a video recording of their panels.

On our website, [“Disarming the WHP \(White Heteropatriarchy\): Deconstructing Power as it is Raced, Classed, Gendered and Intersectional,”](#) my students and I are actively looking for more content from around the university, including undergraduates, graduates, and professionals from other disciplines and departments. We are also working on redesigning the website in order to make it more user-friendly.

In the future, I plan to expand my sex trafficking seminar from two credits to four and to encourage enrollment from graduate students around the university. The additional credits will include a twenty-minute, TED Talk-style presentation that students will upload to the website as well as a group interview styled around *The View*. The students will research a subject matter within the area

of sex trafficking, identify experts in the field, interview the experts, and load an edited recording of the interview on the website. For example, during the week that the seminar addresses “how to use an indictment to control the entire course of sex trafficking litigation,” students will identify prosecutors, defense, attorneys, survivors, scholars, and other experts. They will contact those individuals and prepare for an interview in groups of four to five students. Once the recording has taken place and has been edited, students will load the video to the website. There are several purposes for the exercise: to encourage law students to work in teams and taskforces, engage one another and professionals as a learning process, expand their networks and networking skills, concretize their work in a medium that can be shared with a general audience (thereby avoiding the silo and cloister-like world of the legal academy), and create a work product in which they can take pride.

References

Cook, Blanche Bong. “Disarming the WHP (White Heteropatriarchy): Deconstructing Power as it is Raced, Classed, Gendered and Intersectional.” *Disarming the White Heteropatriarchy*, 2021, <https://disarmingthewhp.createuky.net/>.

Media

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