



ANDY MANIIS

Teaching

As another academic year comes to a close, I have the enjoyable task of taking stock and reviewing the successes of 2006-07. Most of the Law School's public successes have been shared in our publications and on our Web site. But many of the successes of this year are internal accomplishments that do not make the news, although they are important. They often involve projects that require a great deal of imagination and hard work but are not accorded the awards and honors about which we frequently write.

I would like to share one of our internal successes this year, even though it may not be "glitzy,"

because, as I think you will agree, it is important.

This year, a group of faculty members, led by Professors David Schwartz and Keith Findley, looked at the trends occurring in law teaching methods. They focused on several of the priorities in the Law School's Strategic Plan and began a multi-year Teaching Innovation Program to improve teaching quality and stimulate new ideas.

The centerpiece of the 2006-07 Teaching Innovation Program was a very impressive 1½ day teaching conference. The conference was open to all members of the faculty, including our adjunct faculty. Six dynamic presenters from across the country known for their expertise in alternative teaching methods and learning theory (including our alum Gerry Hess '82), brought the program to life, acquainting our faculty with new skills and inspiring creative approaches.

The conference was the beginning of an ongoing initiative to provide the knowledge and motivation for interested faculty to redefine their teaching and to support or participate in broader efforts. It is the initiative of faculty members like Keith and David and the participation of 40 others in this program to improve teaching that

is one of the great successes of this academic year. And it is an initiative that will continue to reap benefits for students and for the employers who hire our graduates.

Unfortunately, this past year also had a significant bump related to teaching. An incident caused by a lecture that dealt in part with the Hmong experience in Wisconsin played out painfully for a number of students and for the professor whose comments were at the heart of the event (see page 4 for the story.) The incident created a local media frenzy and reached a wide audience through the Internet, but there were important lessons, from which we as a school benefited.

We now more clearly recognize the complexity of these situations and the underlying reasons that might make events such as these likely to occur at our school: our commitment to addressing important and often controversial social and policy issues in our classes; our highly diverse student body; an approach that recruits students who have the confidence to speak out; and an environment that encourages students to make known their concerns. It was a difficult way to learn, but learn we did.

As a Wisconsin newspaper editorial stated: while the incident was messy and imperfect, "students, professors, and administrators [sorted] through a difficult circumstance in a reasonably open and sincere manner." I don't think we could ask for much more.

In the end, it has been a very productive year—many successes, many challenges, many gains, and, of course, a continuing commitment to excellence in legal education.

— Dean Kenneth B. Davis, Jr.

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