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Pamela Daiker-Middaugh

Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, Cleveland State University, p.daiker-middaugh@csuohio.edu

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Law Students' Commitment Benefits Everyone

A View on Law Student Participation



by Pamela A. Daiker-Middaugh

The years during law school are usually hectic for law students. Attending classes, studying for exams, law clerking and meeting family demands leave little time for community service. As the faculty advisor to Cleveland-Marshall's Student Public Interest Law Organization (SPILO), I am careful to remind the student officers to offer pro bono and volunteer opportunities that are valuable, but not especially time-consuming.

Last fall, when we were designing the law student component of the Cleveland Bar Association's Education Initiative, we were attentive to these issues. During the training session at Cleveland State and at the law firm of Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue, instructors were quite clear in describing the Initiative model as one of teamwork. Law students would be part of "teams" at each of Cleveland's and East Cleveland's high schools. A team would be comprised of a Street Law teacher, one or more law students, and one or more lawyers.

In spite of their hectic schedules, the law students turned out to be the most committed team members at many of the high schools. More than 60 law students from Cleveland-Marshall and Case Western Reserve took part in the Education Initiative during the 1996-97 school year. Most not only fulfilled their commitments to the Initiative but also contributed extraordinary amounts of time and effort. If the law students who volunteered for the Initiative are indicative of the future of the legal profession, then, as the following students' experiences demonstrate, we are in very good hands.

Amy Altomondo is a third-year law student at Cleveland-Marshall who team-taught practical law at Glenville High School with Street Law teacher Mark Alexander. According to Amy, it was one of the most rewarding experiences of her life. Some of her students told her that learning the law made them feel "strong," and they were amazed to discover that "the power of the mind" can be stronger than the power of physical strength. Amy's students took part in the City of Cleveland Mock Trial Competition at the Justice Center. They told her that it was the first competition they were aware of that relied on mental agility as opposed to athletic ability. I am pleased to report that Amy will be coordinating law student recruitment for the Initiative this year.

Michelle Press, a 1997 graduate of Case Western Reserve, was instrumental in organizing her law school's involvement in the Education Initiative. She taught at Shaw High School with Street Law teacher Lori Urogdy Eiler. Michelle believes that participating in Street Law underscores the "law's importance to the everyday life" of young people. However, she feels that the Street Law program also has many benefits for participating law students. Teaching Street Law better prepares law students for real-world practice, where legal issues do not fall into easy-to-recognize categories. In addition, Street Law, like no other opportunity in law school, enables law students to practice talking to lay people by answering the complex legal questions only teenagers can invent.

Rachel Kabb-Effron, a third-year law student at Cleveland-Marshall,

coordinated her law school's student program. She taught at South High School with Street Law teacher Al Abel, who reports that Rachel was one of the most dedicated law students with whom he has ever worked. Rachel taught at South two to three times a week, and even spent her entire spring break at the school helping them prepare for the City of Cleveland Mock Trial Competition. Her hard work paid off, as South High School came in first place. Rachel says that "nothing has ever made [her] as happy as seeing the faces of the students when Judge Triozzi announced that South won the competition." One of Rachel's favorite students, a young man named Timmy, told her that being part of the winning team was the first time that he had ever been part of something bigger than himself. She says that moment was just one of the many moments in the South classroom when she had to hold back tears of joy.

Of course, there are many other law students who did spectacular work in the classrooms across the city. Each deserves our admiration and appreciation. With the assistance of numerous law students, and many lawyers, this pilot program won rave reviews. I invite each of you to consider contributing some of your time to our children's futures by taking part in the Education Initiative.

This year's Initiative will begin with a training session at Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue on Saturday, September 20 starting at 9 a.m. The author of the *Street Law* high school textbook, Lee Arbetman, will demonstrate how simple it is to design and teach legal lesson plans. All lawyers and law students are welcome to attend. If you have questions, or if you would like to talk to me about the Initiative, please call me at 687-6878. As Timmy said, taking part in the Education Initiative is a terrific way to be part of something bigger than yourself.

About the Author

Pamela A. Daiker-Middaugh is the Immediate Past Chair of the Cleveland Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section and is co-chair of the Education Initiative. She is a Clinical Faculty Member at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law.



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Mon Oct 21 11:05:03 2019

Citations:

Bluebook 20th ed.

Pamela A. Daiker-Middaugh, Law Students' Commitment Benefits Everyone - A View on Law Student Participation, 68 Clev. B.J. 14 (1997).

ALWD 6th ed.

Pamela A. Daiker-Middaugh, Law Students' Commitment Benefits Everyone - A View on Law Student Participation, 68 Clev. B.J. 14 (1997).

APA 6th ed.

Daiker-Middaugh, P. A. (1997). Law students' commitment benefits everyone a view on law student participation. Cleveland Bar Association , 68(10), 14-15.

Chicago 7th ed.

Pamela A. Daiker-Middaugh, "Law Students' Commitment Benefits Everyone - A View on Law Student Participation," Cleveland Bar Association 68, no. 10 (September 1997): 14-15

McGill Guide 9th ed.

Pamela A Daiker-Middaugh, "Law Students' Commitment Benefits Everyone - A View on Law Student Participation" (1997) 68:10 Clevel& B Assoc 14.

MLA 8th ed.

Daiker-Middaugh, Pamela A. "Law Students' Commitment Benefits Everyone - A View on Law Student Participation." Cleveland Bar Association , vol. 68, no. 10, September 1997, p. 14-15. HeinOnline.

OSCOLA 4th ed.

Pamela A Daiker-Middaugh, 'Law Students' Commitment Benefits Everyone - A View on Law Student Participation' (1997) 68 Clev BJ 14

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