

FRESH VOICES, MATURE REFLECTIONS,
THOUGHTFUL SUGGESTIONS, AND
HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Tami K. Lefko*

When we sent out a call for essays inspired by the 2018 LWI Biennial Conference, I was not sure what to expect. Would anyone respond? As the Essay Editor, would I have at least a few essays to edit? As it turns out, I needn't have been worried.

A goal of this series was to “showcase a diverse range of voices, perspectives, and experiences,” and the authors of these essays—including first-time attendees, conference regulars, and those returning after a long absence—did not disappoint. Like the authors, the essays in this series could be categorized in different and overlapping ways. We chose to organize them into four categories: (1) teaching inspiration, (2) the importance of scholarship and the particular scholarship ideas inspired by the conference sessions, (3) the supportiveness of the legal writing community, and (4) our progress and status as a discipline.

First, several authors focused on aspects of teaching inspired by particular presentations. For Ederlina Co, several conference sessions reinforced her view that cultural competency should be seen, and taught, as a fundamental lawyering skill. Robin Konrad came away from a presentation with the idea to pair a substantive legal issue with a professional responsibility issue when designing assignments for first-year students, so that they will have early exposure to an issue of universal importance across practice areas. Paige Carlos and co-authors Ellie Margolis and Kristen Murray were inspired by the plenary presentation on Generation Z to consider how we might approach this generation differently based on their common characteristics—particularly in the area of information literacy. And a session on “helicopter professors” prompted Mary Nicol Bowman to

* Visiting Professor, Stetson University College of Law. When she is not teaching, Professor Lefko (coachlefk@gmail.com) coaches attorneys on their writing, both one-on-one and in seminars. Professor Lefko is a member of the editorial board of this Journal and was the editor of this essay series.

reflect on whether she was providing her students with too much scaffolding or just the right amount.

Second, several authors made new connections to their own research or were inspired and encouraged to continue to prioritize their scholarship. Latisha Nixon-Jones drew inspiration from the plenary talk and a session on fostering growth mindsets to research how to apply particular techniques to foster a growth mindset in a classroom of Generation Z students. Alissa Hartig described a challenge facing legal writing scholars: performing empirical research using human subjects ethically and competently, a topic touched upon by several presenters. Like Latisha Nixon-Jones, Drew Simshaw found that two conference sessions helped him connect what he thought were disparate strands of his scholarship: artificial intelligence and the application of behavioral theories to legal skills. And by pushing herself to run at 6:00 a.m. with other conference attendees, Laura Graham found a new way to think about the trials and tribulations of the publishing process.

Third, a thread connecting many of the essays in this series was the supportiveness and camaraderie of the legal writing community. Touching on this topic and the previous one, Heidi Brown drew inspiration from U2 lyrics to discuss ways we “carry each other” with our scholarship. A chance meeting with Diane Edelman prompted Clayton Steele to attend his first conference and to discover the welcoming nature of this community; Diane Edelman, in turn, returning after a long absence from the Biennials, found that she could help make connections among new attendees while also helping her dear friend Lou Sirico feel connected from afar. Kirsten Davis discussed ways that reading groups help nurture a sense of community and disciplinary identity, among their other positive aspects. And Heather Gram found herself inspired by the supportiveness of this community to participate fully in the rich discussions that are so typical of these conferences.

Finally, several essays reflected on the future of the legal writing discipline and the challenges we face. Ken Swift addressed the importance of practical presentations on teaching legal writing and why these should be valued by law school hiring and promotion committees. Emily Zimmerman and Daniel Filler similarly discussed the scholarly activities of legal writing professors and suggested ways to lower barriers to producing scholarship. From the perspective of a relative newcomer to the legal writing community, Tiffany Jeffers reflected on the value of working from within this community to improve our professional status. And rounding out this topic, Karin Mika brought a long-range perspective to the question of status,

finding inspiration in the new generation of professors who are taking up the cause of equality for the discipline.

On the final day of the conference, the LWI Discipline-Building Working Group discussed ways that we can all work on responding to each other's scholarship more actively.¹ My hope is that this essay series will inspire continued conversations about the many exciting and innovative ideas presented at the 2018 Conference and at other conferences. Perhaps those who have been on the fence about attending a conference will be motivated by this series to join this supportive, productive, and inspirational community in person at the next LWI Biennial Conference.

¹ Linda Berger, Sherri Keene, Ellie Margolis, Anne Mullins, Anne Ralph, Ruth Anne Robbins, and Nantiya Ruan, A Conversation with the LWI Discipline-Building Working Group on Where We Are and Where We're Going, LWI Biennial Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (July 14, 2018).