

THE POWER OF A POSITIVE TWEET

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In full disclosure, I am not a Twitter person. Not at all. So, when I think of Twitter, I think of its toxicity first. I think of how in fewer than 280 characters, a tweet can spark jealousy, hate, anger, shame, and other hurtful emotions. Indeed, its short length “forces a terse tone and eradicates the existence of nuance.”¹ The research on and media attention given to the link between social media use and harmful mental health effects only reinforces a negative impression of Twitter.² Critical tweets can easily spur feelings of inadequacy and anxiety in people and ruin social connections and personal relationships. A negative tweet’s message also can be “liked” and “retweeted,” further contaminating the social media platform with pessimism and causing enduring harm.

If that’s the conventional wisdom about negative tweets, a positive tweet surely must have the opposite effect of rousing appreciation, joy, pride, and other optimistic feelings.

I had the recent experience of being the beneficiary of a complimentary tweet and subsequent retweet. Though I was surprised and absolutely honored by the original tweet, it was the retweet by my Dean, Michael A. Simons, that was a real treat. Yes, it was a “tweet treat.” It was my Dean’s retweet that made me reconsider Twitter and contemplate the power of a positive tweet and its potential to advance the status of legal writing faculty.

Here’s the tweet’s history. Joe Fore, Assistant Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Legal Research and Writing Program at University of Virginia School of Law, tweeted out a link to my recent article in *Perspectives* on live critiquing. In a tweet thread, he tweeted that he found my article, along with several others, particularly

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¹ Rick Paulas, *How Does Twitter Influence the Way We Communicate?*, PACIFIC STANDARD, <https://psmag.com/news/how-does-twitter-influence-the-way-we-communicate> (Jun. 14, 2017).

² See, e.g., Alice G. Walton, *New Studies Show Just How Bad Social Media is for Mental Health*, FORBES,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2018/11/16/new-research-shows-just-how-bad-social-media-can-be-for-mental-health/#233093967af4> (Nov. 16, 2018).

helpful in revising his legal writing curriculum for the upcoming academic year.³ In the tweet, he tagged @StJohnsLaw. My Dean then retweeted it or, in more technical Twitter speak, “quote tweeted” it.⁴ The message he included with the retweet appeared on Twitter as follows:⁵



The message ended after 77 characters, but its positive effect still endures. The retweet made me feel so happy, so appreciated, so respected, so included, and so proud to be a member of the St. John’s University School of Law’s faculty and the broader legal writing community. I was deeply flattered by Joe Fore’s acknowledgement of my work on live critiquing. But I was most overjoyed by my Dean’s recognition and praise for our law school’s legal writing program—a

³ See Joe Fore (@Joe_Fore), Twitter (July 24, 2019, 1:15 p.m.), https://twitter.com/Joe_Fore/status/1154077661632897024. Thank you, Joe Fore, for your kind tweet.

⁴ Larry Cunningham and Rachel H. Smith, who are both Professors of Legal Writing at St. John’s University School of Law, retweeted Joe Fore’s initial tweet as well. Thank you, Larry and Rachel.

⁵ See Mike Simons (@DeanMikeSimons), Twitter (July 25, 2019 7:24 p.m.), <https://twitter.com/DeanMikeSimons/status/1154532899124928513>. Thank you, Dean Simons, for your very positive quote tweet.

program in which I have taught now for fifteen years as an untenured full-time legal writing professor.

Our legal writing program is comprised of a diverse and immensely talented group of professors deeply dedicated to excellent teaching, service, and scholarship. The Dean's simple words about the "great strength" of our program are true. The fact that he chose to share them publicly was significant. Unexpectedly, it stirred incredibly positive feelings. I felt proud. I reflected on how these feelings are some of the same ones that motivate us to seek tenure, to be treated fairly and justly by our faculty colleagues and law school administrators.

I am not naively suggesting that all we need are more positive tweets to solve the inequity problems that still plague many law schools' treatment and advancement of legal writing faculty. But I do wonder whether more positive tweets from administrators, tenured colleagues, and others can help (and more instantaneously) spread positive feelings, heal past harms, build relationships, forge new connections, and ultimately help create more opportunities for success.

In fact, in my work on this essay, I learned that there is a terrific legal writing Twitterverse, connecting through hashtags like #legalwriting and #appellatetwitter, where lawyers, judges, and legal writing professors interact.⁶ There, Twitter users are engaging in important conversations about legal writing, debating ideas, crowdsourcing answers, and sharing helpful resources, just as Joe Fore did. I am amazed by this wonderfully creative and productive use of Twitter—a use that supports the professional growth and promotion of legal writing professors.

Outside the Twitterverse, there is also good evidence that more opportunities for advancement have arisen for legal writing professors. Legal writing professors are routinely being appointed to newly created deanships in areas related assessment and experiential and skills-based education.⁷ In the last 10 years, there are over 100

⁶ Thank you (again) Rachel H. Smith for the Twitter tutorial and help in tweaking (not tweeting) this essay.

⁷ Rebecca L. Scharf, Professor of Law at William S. Boyd School of Law, has compiled a list of legal writing faculty who have held deanship positions over the past decade. She generously shared her list with me after my posting to

examples of legal writing professors serving as deans, associate deans, and assistant deans in several critical areas, such as academic success, academic affairs, lawyering skills, experiential skills, and the like.⁸ There seems to be a keen awareness that legal writing faculty are exceptionally adept at teaching in these areas and preparing students for legal practice.

Imagine tweets announcing every one of those appointments and a tweet praising every notable teaching, scholarly, and other contribution by a legal writing professor. Now imagine the countless “likes” and “retweets.” That sure would produce a lot of treats for our legal writing community to share. And while that surge of positivity is important, it is the public acknowledgement of our many accomplishments as legal writing faculty that is a basic yet crucial first step in conferring greater responsibility and higher status on us. Hence, the power of a positive tweet.

the legal writing listserv on August 12, 2019, inquiring about this type of data. A copy of the list is on file with me.

⁸ *Id.*