

A GENEROUS GIFT IN A TIME OF SCARCITY

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Scholarly essays may be less exhaustive than scholarly articles, but they are also targeted and often personal, which can make them more impactful—especially when offered as a coordinated group. Reading essays written around a theme should feel like sitting around the dinner table with smart, thoughtful colleagues whose ideas connect with or contradict your own. And in this challenging year, learning from colleagues around a dinner table is a longed-for luxury.

Volume 25 includes two sets of essays. The first set of essays came from a call for submissions around the theme of “Disruption,” with an open invitation to share how COVID-19 or civil unrest has affected our teaching, our course goals, and our scholarship. The second set grew out of a 2020 AALS Discussion Group on the Multi-Generational Teaching of Legal Writing. Discussion Group participants explored teaching differences that may exist between the four generations of legal writing professors now teaching at United States law schools.

As I read these two sets of essays, I was struck by their complementary and overlapping themes. Both sets of essays powerfully champion our profession and explore ways to improve not only our teaching, but the law itself through our teaching. As part of our response to current challenges, many essays in the first set recommend that we use the classroom to help students see themselves and the law as a power for social change. Sha-Shana Crichton notes that now is a critical time to build students’ faith in the system they will join and in those who will work alongside them. Both Sherri Lee Keene and Emily Kline describe their increased efforts to teach the power of a client’s or a citizen victim’s narrative, and to help students see when those narratives may not be given space in the law. Finally, Sonya Bonneau and Susan McMahon call on all of us to forcefully “confront the silence of legal analysis.” The entire reason for the second set of essays is to inform and thereby strengthen our individual and institutional progress, to ensure we honor and build on past efforts and don’t unnecessarily reinvent solutions for problems others have already solved. An anemic understanding of past scholarship and pedagogy will limit our ability to respond to current challenges.

Disruption—or more accurately our current scarcity of in-person time and resources—forces us to be selective and creative in our

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problem solving, which also makes us personally and institutionally more reflective.¹ What is our essential role in students' legal education? What classroom techniques have worked in the past, and what new techniques are better suited to this new environment and these students? I found Jan Levine's and Melissa Weresh's second-set essays particularly grounding in the face of the disruption of 2020. Professor Levine warns in his essay that changes we make and recommend to others in our teaching and scholarship cannot myopically ignore the lessons provided by past scholars and cannot silence the fruitful discord of our members. Professor Weresh's essay follows with a summary of the past individual and institutional efforts to address status inequity and to build legal writing scholarship. She notes the "delicate balance" necessary to honor past efforts while still being receptive to newer approaches by those in our current different reality.

Another theme that runs through both sets of essays is our desire to build greater empathy with each other and with our students. In the first set of essays, Iselin Gambert cautions that the disruption of 2020 may not provide us all with "true creativity and bursts of productivity," but may instead cause an isolating grief, both at a macro and micro level. Her concerns are echoed by Jennifer Brinkley, Sha-Shana Crichton, and Alison Mikkor, who all note the increased intimacy of seeing students in their homes, sometimes in crisis, and who call for compassion for our students and for ourselves. To build trust in these moments of intimacy, Harmony Decosimo beautifully recommends "the messy, uncomfortable, but strangely powerful experience of being vulnerable." In the second set of essays, Meredith Stange attributes her long-term satisfaction with teaching to her supportive professional network. Drew Simshaw notes the power of personal reflection in building "an empathetic mindset" for today's students, particularly first-generation students, students with disabilities, and students from underrepresented communities.

The entire world has been constrained in multiple ways in 2020. For some of us and in some situations, our scarcity has given rise to desperate, creative problem solving. Many of these essays, including those by Sabrina Little, Ann Nowak, and Hilary Reed, recommend specific teaching techniques for our times. But for others of us—and likely for all of us at some times—scarcity has just meant we have less

¹ Uri Neren, *The Number One Key to Innovation: Scarcity*, HARVARD BUS. REV. (Jan. 14, 2011), <https://hbr.org/2011/01/the-number-one-key-to-innovati> (reporting on a meta-analysis of 162 studies on innovation, where the one factor each innovation study identified was "the value of scarcity as a spur to creative problem-solving").

than we should have and we are able to do less than we would like. In the current time of scarcity, these essays are a generous gift of inspiration and commiseration.