

AALS SECTION ON ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The Learning Curve

Spring 2004

The Learning Curve is an informal newsletter reporting on issues and ideas for the AALS Section on Academic Support and the general law school academic support community. Please contact me with ideas, announcements, and article submissions. I anticipate publishing another issue in the fall of 2004 and welcome your ideas and submissions at any time. You may contact me at nattgan@regent.edu and at 757.226.4852 at Regent University School of Law in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

*Natt Gantt, Editor
Regent University School of Law*

SECTION NEWS 2

ANNOUNCEMENTS 4

ARTICLES 4

Report on NY-Area Academic
Support Colloquium 4

Pacific/McGeorge Initiates
Two New ASP Programs 5

Helping Students Unravel
the Mysteries of Multiple
Choice Exams 5

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT 8

SECTION OFFICERS 9

SECTION NEWS

News from the Section Chair: Academic Support Programs at AALS 2005

Please mark your calendars for next year's AALS Annual Meeting in San Francisco, January 5-8, 2005. The theme of the meeting is "Engaged Scholarship" and the Academic Support Section will be sponsoring two programs and a continental breakfast.

Our first program is "It Takes a Village: A Multi-faceted Approach to Bar Passage," co-sponsored with the Section on Student Services, on Wednesday, January 5th from 2-5 p.m. This extended program will bring together Deans, Faculty, as well as Academic Support and Student Services professionals to explore the different approaches law schools across the country are developing to address the issues surrounding the bar examination. To enable program participants to learn about other schools' efforts to improve bar passage, the program will consist of panel presentations as well breakout sessions. If, like many of us, you have been asked to help develop and implement programs for the bar exam, you will find this session extremely helpful.

This year our business meeting will take place at a continental breakfast on Thursday morning, January 6th at 7:30 a.m. Our program planning committee thought a breakfast would be a great opportunity for us to talk and share ideas. If you have materials for a class or workshop, or a problem or exercise that has worked well for you, please bring 25 copies of it and we will set them out to share. While we plan to conclude the business meeting by 8:30 a.m. so that those who wish to go to the AALS Workshop on Evaluating Students and Evaluating Outputs may do so, those who wish to spend additional time talking will be able to remain and chat.

Our second program, "Teachers and Students--Know Thyself: Developing Reflective Learning Skills for a Lifetime of Academic and Professional Success," is scheduled for Friday, January 7th from 4:00-5:45 p.m. (right after the plenary session). This program features our own Marty Peters (Iowa), Nancy Soonpaa (Texas Tech), and Rachel Rouse (DePaul). Our dynamic trio will present an interactive workshop on learning styles, focusing not just on our students' learning styles but also our own, and giving us food for thought on how the teacher's learning style helps or hinders the learning of students in the classroom. This will be a terrific workshop and we hope that you will attend.

I look forward to seeing all of you in January.

Teresa Wallace
Chair, AALS Section on Academic Support
Associate Professor and Director of Academic Services
Widener University School of Law (Delaware Campus)

Report from the Section Business Meeting at the 2004 AALS Meeting

The Section held its 2004 business meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, January 3, 2004 at the annual meeting in Atlanta. Below are the highlights of the meeting:

Election of Section Officers

The attendees first elected the Section Officers for 2004:

Chair:	Teresa Wallace (Widener)
Chair-Elect:	Carolyn Nygren (Stetson)
Secretary:	Ellen Suni (UMKC)
Treasurer:	Marty Peters (Iowa)
Board Members:	Kris Franklin (NYLS) (expires 2006)
	Nancy Soonpaa (Texas Tech) (expires 2006)
	Joanne Koren (Miami) (expires 2005)
	Kelly Levi (Pace) (expires 2005)
Past Chair:	Paul Bateman (Southwestern)

Program at 2005 Meeting

The attendees then elected the 2005 Program Committee:

Marty Peters, Chair
Nancy Soonpaa
Teresa Wallace
Carolyn Nygren
Rachel Dawson

Attendees also engaged in preliminary discussion about the content of the 2005 program. Discussion centered on what might be appropriate for an AALS program (general appeal) as opposed to something more appropriate for an ASP conference, where the audience would be mainly ASP professionals.

Section Newsletter

At the meeting, Natt Gantt (Regent) indicated he was interested in working on the newsletter. (Since the meeting, Natt agreed to take on the responsibility for *The Learning Curve*; Paul will remain a "contributing editor" and will assist Natt with the newsletter.)

Section Homepage

Barbara Glesner Fines (UMKC) noted that the Section could have its own web address. Barbara indicated that setting up an address is relatively inexpensive and would give the section a more "permanent" place to deposit ASP information.

Paul Bateman, Past Chair
Director of Academic Support Program and Instructor
Southwestern University School of Law

Section Program at AALS 2004

The Section held its 2004 Program on Monday, January 5. The program, entitled “Exploring the Scholarship and Teaching and Learning,” provided an insightful discussion focusing on current research and research techniques in the field of law school academic support. The program consisted of two parts. The first featured five panelists who discussed their research projects as they related to academic support and who provided “user tips” for those interested in trying a similar approach.

First, Carolyn Nygren (Stetson) discussed her findings from comparing Contracts exam grades at Stetson. From her research, she hypothesized that feedback in one class setting will improve student performance in another area. Carolyn’s findings also indicated that first semester performance may be related more to exam skills than to substantive expertise.

Joanne Ingram (NYLS) and Elaine Mills (Albany) then reported on the data they gathered from surveys on the individual learning styles of law students and faculty. Their findings indicated, among other things, that faculty and student learning styles tend to be different. For instance, they discovered that faculty are apt to be more comfortable than are students with unstructured learning settings and that faculty learn better in the morning whereas students learn better in the afternoon.

Kelly Levi (Pace) next discussed her research that measured the effectiveness of Pace’s academic support program. The three areas studied—individual skills programs, workshop programs, and TA programs—indicated that academic support benefited all students who participated. (For additional information on Kelly’s research, see below.)

John DiPippa (Arkansas-Little Rock) then presented his findings about memory processes and their application to law school teaching. John found, for example, that it is perhaps better to teach fewer things in greater detail than to try to cover everything. John discussed his findings as they related to auditory and visual learning styles.

The second part of the program featured three panelists, Dean Nancy Rapoport (Houston), Dean Don Welch (Vanderbilt), and Gita Wilder (LSAC). Deans Rapoport and Welch offered two deans’ perspective on the importance of academic support research. As a former editor of the *Journal of Legal Education*, Dean Welch also addressed topic selection and publication guidelines for such research. Gita Wilder, a social research scientist, offered an informed perspective on research methodology. All three panelists addressed ways to find institutional support—both time and money—to turn research ideas into published articles.

The program marked another leap forward in the Section’s brief history. The program drew a sizable audience and generated

provocative discussion during the question and answer portion at the end of the program. Special thanks go Leslie Garfield (Pace) for moderating the panel and to Nancy Soonpaa (Texas Tech) and the program committee for their hard work in putting together the program.

Contributed by Paul Bateman & Natt Gantt

Kelly Levi submitted to The Learning Curve the following detailed discussion of her presentation. Kelly also described her study in the Winter 2003 issue of The Learning Curve.

Report from Comprehensive Study of Pace Academic Support Program

Leslie Garfield and Kelly Levi of Pace Law School completed an 18 month study, funded by LSAC, in which they studied the effectiveness of Pace’s ASP over a five-year period. The study evaluated first-year Academic Support services, including the Teaching Assistant/Dean’s Scholar Program, the Workshop Series, and the Individual Skills Development Service.

The statistical regression analysis of participants and eligible non-participants demonstrated that each service yielded a benefit to participants, meaning that each service proved statistically significant with respect to one or more of three outcomes, including: (1) retention; (2) increase in GPA; and (3) bar passage. More specifically, the results showed that students benefited most from the Individual Skills Development Service followed by the Workshop Program. The TA/Dean’s Scholar Service yielded the least statistically significant outcome. It did, however, yield a benefit.

The authors then sought to determine which student or students benefited most from these services. The study included various criteria, including ethnicity, LSAT score, undergraduate GPA, part-time/full-time student status, gender, and socio-economic status. Surprisingly, no one group of academic support students out-performed any other group of academic support students. Therefore, all participants of each service benefited from one or more service, with no one group of students yielding a more statistically significant benefit than another group. No background variable proved to be significant.

The authors, who presented their findings at the AALS Program in Atlanta, articulate the findings in a lengthy article published in the forthcoming edition of *The Brigham Young Journal of Law and Education*. The authors write that the study suggests interesting conclusions with respect to program design and selection. More specifically, the findings indicate that law school administrations should consider devoting Academic Support resources to one-on-one services and that selecting students based on specific criteria excludes numerous students who may benefit from participation in Academic Support services.

Kelly Levi
Adjunct Professor & Director of Academic Support
Pace Law School

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next LSAC National Workshop to be held June 2005

The next LSAC National Academic Assistance Training Workshop will be held June 8-11, 2005 in Las Vegas, Nevada. It will be hosted by UNLV Boyd School of Law.

In an e-mail to the ASP listserv on April 16, 2004, Planning Committee Co-Chairs Charlotte Taylor (DePaul) and Ellen Suni (UMKC) reported that the members of the Planning Committee talked several times via conference calls and initially planned to have the conference in June 2004. The committee soon discovered that there were too many conflicts in June and then tried to schedule the workshop in late July. The committee anticipated that late July would work better for those with summer programs and bar preparation programs. After some listserv members expressed concerns about the July date, the co-chairs took a survey on the listserv and found that several people had problems with the late July date, as well as with a possible October date. The Committee then decided that early June would be best, but again due to other conflicts and conferences, discovered it was not feasible to plan a conference for June 2004. The Committee therefore decided to have the conference in June 2005 and set a date now so that similar conflicts should not arise in 2005.

Members of the Workshop Planning Committee are Ellen Suni (Co-chair) (UMKC), Charlotte Taylor (Co-chair) (DePaul), Janice Austin (Penn State), Natt Gantt (Regent), Kent Lollis (LSAC), Tim Naccarato (Pacific/McGeorge), David Nadvorney (CUNY), Carolyn Nygren (Stetson), Vickie Rainwater (Texas Wesleyan), and Rey Valencia (St. Mary's).

Contributed by Natt Gantt

NY-Area Academic Support Colloquium to be held June 3, 2004

This semester's NY-area Academic Support Colloquium will meet at New York Law School on Thursday, March 3, beginning at noon and lasting through much of the afternoon.

Confirmed topics will include: the unique issues in working with evening students, coordinating/cooperating with (other) law school faculty, working with students with disabilities, and the relationships between law school curriculum and problems of under/over-confidence.

Anyone who'd like to come who has not yet confirmed or decided on a discussion topic, please let us know as soon as possible. New York Law School is located at 47 Worth Street in Tribeca, near the 1 train at Franklin Street and the 2, 3, A & C trains at

Chambers Street. For directions, or a pass to use the parking lot, please contact Stefanie Cordaro at (212) 431-2353 or scordaro@nyls.edu or write to me directly at kfranklin@nyls.edu.

Contributed by Kris Franklin

How to Get on the ASP Listserv

If you are interested in getting on the ASP listserv, send an e-mail to listproc@chicagokent.kentlaw.edu. In the text of the message, type only the following: subscribe ASP-L (first name, last name, position, school).

ARTICLES

Report on NY-Area Academic Support Colloquium

Kris Franklin
Associate Professor of Law
Director, Academic Skills
New York Law School

We've been lonely. There are now three faculty members at New York Law School who teach classes that are essentially based in academic support theory and one senior administrator who runs our formal academic support program. That's a lot of folks at one school. But like many of us in this field, all of us come from backgrounds in related disciplines but essentially started doing law school academic support work in isolation.

The regional and national LSAC conferences have been enormously helpful to those of us who have been able to attend them. The presentations are always well-thought-out, and the materials that people distribute are a godsend. But the most valuable part of the conferences, at least what I have found most helpful, are the people themselves: people who have the same goals for our students that we do and who have been struggling with the same sets of contradictions and difficulties that we face daily. I'd love to bring them all home with me and take out a handy pack of colleagues to talk things over with whenever I have a question. From a purely selfish perspective, that's essentially what the NY-area ASP Colloquium is intended to be.

After an initial meeting to decide whether there was sufficient interest and to plan logistics, we decided that meeting once a semester would be helpful and that our gatherings would be small, informal, and participant-run. In other words, we determined that our purpose is to share insights and ideas and help one another solve problems in our work. All who attend are asked to lead a discussion on some aspect of their work, and topics are generated by those who commit to coming. In many ways, however, our topics are simply a reference point; most

of our discussion has moved from the initial focus to other aspects of our work. This discussion is really the point. Because many of us do not have a great number of colleagues at our own schools who fully understand the issues in our work, getting together to talk to one another is invaluable, and the topics covered in our colloquium sessions provide a focus for our conversations.

So far, this is still a new format. We held one session in this style in December 2003, and plan to hold another in June. Logistics are difficult because the varying nature of everyone's jobs makes it hard to find a time of year when everyone who might want to come is available. But we hope to have a core group of 6-12 regular participants. The NY metropolitan area is large and has many law schools. Are there other areas in the country where this could work? Perhaps not, but we encourage folks to try. For a relatively small investment in planning and organizing, the meetings themselves have the potential to be enormously helpful.

Pacific/McGeorge Initiates Two New ASP Programs

Tim Naccarato

Director of Academic Support and Lecturer in Law
University of the Pacific—McGeorge School of Law

During the spring semester of 2003, Pacific/McGeorge began offering a two-unit elective, Principles of Agency (POA), to first-year students whose fall midterm grades indicated they could use additional help. The course is offered in place of Criminal Law, a three-unit required course. Students who decide to take POA in the spring semester can take Criminal Law during the summer or fall semester of their second year.

The purpose of POA is twofold: 1) to help students improve the basic skills needed to succeed in law school and legal practice; and 2) to teach the law of Agency. Course materials are shorter than most semester courses to allow time for work on seven basic skills: critical thinking, critical reading, critical listening, case briefing, note taking, outlining, and exam writing. Part of the attraction of the elective is that it allows students to focus more energy on their core courses. The first half of the course covers the doctrine of respondeat superior, with which students are familiar from Torts. The second half of the course covers principal-agent relationships, which relate to their Contracts and Property courses. The students are split into four sections.

After reviewing the fall grades on an accelerated basis in early January 2003, we sent out letters to 99 first-year students inviting them to consider POA. Seventy four elected to take the course. Of the 68 who took the final exam (six had voluntarily withdrawn for various reasons), 52 (76%) raised

their grades sufficiently to return in good standing. Overall, the Pacific/McGeorge academic disqualification rate for first-year students in 2003 was 6.5%, a drop of approximately 50% from the previous year.

The second program initiated in October of 2003 is the Skills Support Team. This team consists of three highly-qualified second-year students who are available to tutor students in the skills needed to succeed in law school. They are available by email or during office hours held in the Student Center. The Skills Support Team replaces the tutoring provided under the Minority Support Program and is available to all students.

Please contact me at 916-739-7399 or tnaccarato@pacific.edu for further details.

Helping Students Unravel the Mysteries of Multiple Choice Exams

Martha M. Peters

Director, Academic Achievement Program
University of Iowa College of Law

When students started coming to me for help with multiple-choice exams, I did not know what to do to help them other than to recommend materials related to the ways professors create distractions in multiple-choice exams. The source to which I refer students is Stephen Finz's book on preparing for the multi-state bar exam, *The Finz Multistate Method* (Aspen 2003). Finz gives an excellent description of the structure of multiple-choice testing, and he provides various methods and hints for students to use in walking the maze set up by professors who are trying to ascertain the knowledge level of their students.

What this approach does not address is the students' individual tendencies as they approach multiple-choice questions. Some students seem to have the knowledge level professors seek as demonstrated by excellent performance on essay tests, but they consistently score in the bottom of their peer group on the multiple-choice parts of exams. Through working with these students and others, I have developed a fairly simple method for learning more about students' tendencies and helping them develop strategies for law context multiple-choice exams. I will first describe the method I use and will then share a number of common patterns discovered through using this method.

Basic Method:

Quite simply, I start with a sheet of paper or legal pad that I number on the left side from one to the final number of questions on the exam. I leave one or two lines free to make notes on students' reflections as we examine their responses. I need the student's

answer sheet, a copy of the exam, and the professor's answers. I ask students to bring with them their outline, notes, or other primary source for studying for the exam with which we are working.

I then compare the student's answers with the professor's answer sheet. For each correct answer, I simply put a check mark by the question number and continue until I find a question that the student missed. Next to the matching number on my paper, I write the letter or number of the student's answer, an arrow, and the correct option's letter or number. If the professor has a second best answer, I write that after the first correct answer and use parentheses around the letter or number to distinguish it as a second best answer. If the student's answer is the second best answer, I place parentheses around the student's answer. If the student has erased an answer, I note that and in the margin make a "+" if the erased answer went from a mistake to the correct answer, a "-" if the chosen answer went from a correct answer to a wrong answer, and an "=" sign if the erased answer went from one incorrect answer to another incorrect answer. This process helps answer the question of whether this particular student tends to benefit from changing answers.

Unless a student wants to revisit correct answers, and they seldom do, we concentrate on incorrect ones. I start with the presumption that students studied and understood their course material before exams. Our goal is to find patterns that drew the student from correct answers.

Once we find an incorrect choice, the student reads the question and looks for the differences between the answer option the student chose and the one the professor wanted. I ask students to look for what drew them from the correct response, and I write down any ideas students have of what pulled them to an incorrect answer. At the beginning of this process, I just note whatever students say. I also look over some questions and options to get a feel for patterns students might miss. When there is a content question, we note that for students to consult their professors.

Common Mistake Patterns:

◆ **Insufficient knowledge:** This is the "I just didn't know the answer" response. I do find that some students either did not study in enough depth because they thought they would recognize answers from their general level of understanding of written materials and class discussion or did not study in a way that helped them respond to the types of questions their professor asked on the exam. It is often helpful to consult the student's study materials to see if the student can find an answer to a missed question in those materials. If not, looking for the answer points out to students that they may not be studying what they need to study. They are then more receptive to looking at improving their note-taking, organizing methods, or other study strategies.

◆ **Working problems:** Sometimes students study concepts that lend themselves to a problem format but do not take the time to practice by applying these concepts to concrete problems. One example is Property fact patterns related to future interests. When students must work out a complex fact pattern for the first time on a multiple-choice exam, they may find it more complicated than they anticipated. Actually working through the problem step by step to insure accuracy may also take more time than they budgeted. Time pressure and rushing may contribute to careless mistakes. Working practice problems is the obvious antidote. I often ask students what they did to prepare for math tests, and they almost always worked lots of problems because working through problems helped them become familiar with the strategies they needed to employ. The more familiar they were with the steps of solving a problem, the faster they could do them. Working through practice problems helps make the theory concrete and helps students work through exam problems more accurately and quickly.

◆ **Complex situations with lots of details:** A related problem is a complex situation that has too many facts to keep track of mentally, especially in the stress of an exam situation. Students may focus on a few facts and miss information important to the question. Learning to draw abbreviated diagrams or pictures can help keep details and sequences of events straight.

◆ **Making assumptions:** This category is broad and has many variations.

- Students may read question scenarios too quickly and make assumptions about the fact pattern without reading all of the facts carefully. They thus miss important facts that would have influenced their analysis and their option choice.
- Students may make assumptions about what is going to be asked from a quick read of the question and not attend to the exact wording of the call of the question. They then choose an option that answers what they thought the question would ask, not the option that answers the actual question asked.
- Students may disregard options they consider too simple because they assume their professors are looking for complex answers.
- Students may fill extra information into options that are in the direction they want to go with their answer. They fail to realize that the option is incomplete and as such is not the best answer for the question that is being asked.

◆ Being distracted by an option that tracks a case: Some options may be correct statements and yet not the best answer to the actual question asked. Students remember the case and choose the option, forgetting to check for whether that option is the best for the question that is being asked.

◆ Disagreeing with the question being asked: Students may find the question impractical and disregard it, looking for an answer they think is more realistic to what the question should have asked.

◆ Answering as a lay person: Students may not realize that they must look for appropriate legal tests and find themselves drawn to options that are “fair” or “right” results but do not track the legal rules.

◆ Not reading all options: Law students often have developed test-taking strategies that are useful for standardized tests and other subject area multiple-choice tests but are not helpful for taking law based multiple-choice exams. These students may pick the first option that fits the question and move on to the next question to save time, never even reading the correct option.

These are a few of the common patterns I find, but individual students may have other patterns or variations on these patterns. Usually patterns start emerging about one third to half way through the questions, but I find it useful to keep going to see if the patterns are consistent over the whole test and all types of course material. As patterns begin to emerge, I start developing some working hypotheses with the students so we can test our hypotheses against later questions. I also want to see if the patterns change as students become tired or as they encounter different types of material. Just finding patterns gives a starting place for changing study patterns or for developing new strategies and approaches.

Following this exam review inquiry it is helpful to have students work through multiple-choice questions for current classes in which they will have multiple-choice tests. I instruct the students to try the interventions that seem appropriate adaptations in response to the patterns we have found. In addition to those interventions listed above with the patterns, here are some more suggestions.

More interventions:

◆ Pay extra attention to reading details. Highlight important facts. Sometimes using a piece of paper to track each line keeps students from skipping over information, especially if they have a habit of looking ahead for key words.

◆ Read questions and options to hear the words as if reading them aloud. If students are in a room by themselves, they may benefit from actually reading aloud.

◆ Chart or draw fact patterns and event or time lines.

◆ Try reading the call of the question first, but practice to make sure this strategy works well because it only works for some students, not all.

◆ Read the questions backwards. First read the options, then the call, and finally the fact scenario. This process works well for students who make lots of assumptions. There are a few students who read a question and think of what they consider to be the right answer. If the answer they want is not one of the options, they may be quite distracted and even resentful. Reading the options first alerts them to their available choices and helps them avoid locking into an answer that is not an option.

I now find that working with multiple-choice questions is as helpful in gathering information about students' learning and exam taking needs as is working with essay exams. The mystery has been replaced with a conviction that there are discernable reasons students have problems and that they can learn to modify their practices to develop more effective test taking skills.

Students who consistently have problems with multiple-choice testing must learn the requisite skills as soon as possible. If they delay learning these skills, students may undermine their own confidence by doing poorly on several multiple-choice tests. When this stress reaction to testing occurs, interventions become more complex.

Even though I no longer avoid multiple-choice test investigations, I am still learning about them. I learn something from just about every student. Of course, for me, unraveling the mysteries of students' learning needs and helping them become more aware of their own learning processes are part of the joy of working with academic support! As you find other patterns in working with your students, I hope you will share them with me and with others on the ASP listserv. I look forward to hearing your discoveries.

Editor's Postscript: What I Learned this Semester

L.O. Natt Gantt, II
Assistant Professor and Director of Academic Success
Regent University School of Law

I just completed grading 128 papers. This past semester, I taught one of the writing sections in Regent's course entitled Advanced Legal Reasoning, Analysis & Writing. The course, which I described in detail in an article in the spring 2002 issue of *The Learning Curve*, is a course we offer to graduating students to help them hone the analytical and writing skills they have learned in law school. The course consists of two components. The first component is a traditional classroom component, which I have taught for the last four years. In the second component, students break down into small groups and complete weekly take-home writing assignments from professors who rotate among the groups. This year, I decided also to teach a writing section.

Thirty-two students enrolled in the course, and I broke them down into three groups. Each group completed four assignments for each small-group professor. I therefore had to draft four writing assignments. I decided to draft assignments in four different subject areas: Legal Ethics, Contracts, Property, and Constitutional Law. I wrote four fact-pattern essay-type questions as well as four detailed grading guides and sample answers.

The experience of leading a writing section was enlightening for me. First, I learned from having to draft the assignments. As ASP professionals, we often analyze other professors' questions and answers. Although I've drafted essay questions and answers before for the doctrinal course I teach, Law and Professional Responsibility, drafting questions and answers in four different subject areas forced me to reflect on certain analytical and writing issues that arise in different doctrinal areas. I gleaned important insights from thinking about how, for instance, a student might adopt a different strategy in approaching a Contracts question on bona-fide purchase versus a Constitutional Law question on Equal Protection and Substantive Due Process. Reflecting on these similarities and differences will help me in my ASP duties in advising students on general study tips and techniques across all doctrinal areas.

Second, I learned from grading all those papers. Seeing the analytical and writing strengths and weaknesses of our third-year students helped me know what tips I need to emphasize even more in working with first-year students as part of Regent's Academic Success Program. For instance, I was surprised to see the extent to which the third-year students still neglected to address all the issues in a multi-issue question. When I reviewed the questions with them, they commented that they didn't discuss a particular issue because either they didn't see

it or, if they had, they didn't think it was important. To me, this weakness underscored how it is important to emphasize to students how they must scrutinize all the facts in a question to determine their relevance. They've got to "dig deep."

Third, I learned from seeing students' responses to their grades. This class was the first time I passed out assignments and witnessed first-hand students' disappointment over their grades. I was tough on these students, and in the beginning, I wondered whether I was being too tough. I reminded myself, however, how students can learn only if they know their areas for improvement. Easy grading only masks weaknesses that will likely be exposed in practice. Because these students were about to graduate, I believed that such rigorous grading was even more important. They would soon be facing challenging bar exams and rigorous work environments. It's better that they get a not-so-wonderful grade from me than they lose an important case on appeal because their brief contains analytical flaws. My high standards caused tension with some students in the beginning, and I explained to them the reasons behind my rigorous grading. By the end of the semester, nearly all of them came to see my standards as a helpful preparation for their legal career.

This last lesson taught me an important insight I will apply in directing our Academic Success Program. Although students (like all of us) generally don't like constructive criticism, it can make them better thinkers, better writers, and better lawyers. The trick, to borrow a phrase from the Bible, is learning how to "speak the truth in love." In our Academic Success Program, I am newly resolved to find that balance. I see my primary role in directing the program as "teaching students how to fish"; that is, teaching them skills that will help them succeed as law students and then as lawyers. In the program, students should be challenged to push themselves to use the analytical gifts they have (or, as I tell my students, to "maximize the gifts God has given you"). They also, however, must accept this challenge. I therefore need to be demanding and encouraging.

Grading all those papers was a lot of work. In order to help the students as much as I could, I gave them extensive feedback on each assignment, so grading each paper took a good amount of time. But the process was worth it. I believe the students benefited from the class (many said as much), and I know I learned several things that will help me in my work with our Academic Success Program. Hopefully others in the ASP community will also learn from my experience.

SECTION OFFICERS

Chair:	Teresa Wallace (Widener)
Chair-Elect:	Carolyn Nygren (Stetson)
Secretary:	Ellen Suni (UMKC)
Treasurer:	Marty Peters (Iowa)
Board Members:	Kris Franklin (NYLS) (expires 2006) Nancy Soonpaa (Texas Tech) (expires 2006) Joanne Koren (Miami) (expires 2005) Kelly Levi (Pace) (expires 2005)
Newsletter Editor:	Natt Gantt (Regent)
Past Chair and Newsletter Contributing Editor:	Paul Bateman (Southwestern)

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the AALS Section on Academic Support or the Association of American Law Schools.