

Law Without Walls

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Written by Roy Black



<http://www.royblack.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/lwow-con-2015.jpg>) I was invited by Michelle DeStefano, through Georgie Angones (Ms. Everything-at-the-school), to participate in the strangely worded “ConPosium” which is the final stage of the Law Without Walls competition.

I walked into the Newman Alumni Center at 8 am on a Sunday, not knowing quite what to expect, and I was surprised by the room. It had a special vibe. This was no formulaic mock court proceeding. This is the future. The auditorium was transformed into a full multimedia environment, not just media to compliment a legal argument, but rather an immersion in media. Large video screens and

laptop computers filled the room. In one corner was a bullpen with at least ten people furiously typing on their computers. This was the media department, not for the room, but for the net broadcast around the world.

As the program progressed I felt I was in a legal TED show on steroids. The student presentations had musical scores, documentary footage, and oral advocacy all while live chats were being scrolled on a large screen right behind me.

Law Without Walls was created by Michele DeStefano, a professor at the University of Miami School of Law, to influence the future of legal education and law practice. It is advertised as a part-virtual, fully global, and a multi-disciplinary collaboration meeting at the intersection of law, business, technology, and innovation. It lived up to its billing.

I was a judge for the Project of Worth (the name for the presentations) “Training the Trainers: which skills should law professors have for 21st century professoring.” It was presented by Shenglan Chen, Isabel Galaz Velasco, Nicholas Dowd and their mentor was Eoin Mac Aodha, an associate at Eversheds, an international law firm headquartered in London, with offices in major cities across the Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. On the panel with me was Leo Staub, a Swiss law professor, Vasco Bilbao-Bastida, a Deloitte accountant and Casey Silver, an entrepreneur.

I have been an adjunct professor at UM for forty one years, so I was deeply interested in hearing some new ideas for the adjunct program. I wasn’t disappointed. Adjunct professors bridge the gap between pure academia and the practice of law. The law schools do well with the classical casebook method (developed at Harvard between 1870 and 1895); not so well on teaching practical matters like trial skills. After a hundred years of doing it one way, perhaps it is time to re-assess. The schools rashly assume the law firms will take up trial instruction, but this never works because they are in the business of making money, not running a school, and few lawyers are skilled teachers.

The presentation had ideas for better training for adjuncts, communication between them (online and in person) and preparation of class materials. I already do a form of this. I post all my teaching materials on our website and discuss virtually everything I teach on this blog. I like to get out my ideas and if anyone thinks they're worth while they are welcome to use them. I teach because one doesn't master a subject matter until they can teach it simply to another. And just like writing this blog it causes me to reflect on what I have done so I can explain it and draw conclusions from it.

The mixed panel of lawyers and business people asked penetrating questions on practicality, cost and scalability of the project. I was convinced and hope the students follow through with their suggestions. In any event, I think that anything that gets students on their feet and advocating is great training.

I communicated after the event with Ivy Chen Shenglan. She is a third-year law student from Peking University School of Transnational Law pursuing her Juris Doctor degree in U.S. common law and Juris Master degree in Chinese civil law. She is a Senior Editor for Peking University Transnational Law Review. She serves as research assistant for Professor Francis Snyder and Richard Schepard, researching on WTO trade policy review mechanism, EU-China relations, and international investment treaty negotiation and arbitration.

She wrote about her experience in the program. "The LawWithoutWalls program is a whole new experience for me, too. This is my first time working closely with people from different countries virtually... This is also my first time working on business plans and technology issues, such as building a website and making a video. This program opened more gates for me by showing me things other than law. By participating in this program, I learnt how to think from a business perspective."

I also communicated with Maximilian Viski-Hanka, one of my students this past year. I ran into him the morning of the program and he gave me a quick rundown of his presentation. Afterwards he sent me an email with the following observations: "My partner and I were fortunate enough to win Law Without Walls, and many people told us that that was the best presentation they had seen in the history of program. Though a different context, the skills I learned in simply giving an opening argument played a large role in the success of my presentation. For that, I cannot thank you enough... [Yes, I included this as a shameless plug]."

"Participating in Law Without Walls was a truly incredible experience. The program started in Dublin in January, where we got to meet the fellow students, mentors, attorneys, professors, business people, etc., all of whom participated in the program. The true value of the kickoff was meeting the people with whom I was to be working with virtually for the following three months.

The conposium itself was an absolute blast and made all of the hard work worth it. It was amazing to get everyone together and see what people had been working on. It was also amazing to meet all of the people who were part of the Law Without Walls community. This included successful people throughout the world who were both mentors and judges. To be able to speak and get advice from people of such magnitude as a student was really incredible."

For some unknown reason Max is seeking an LLM in tax at NYU. I keep telling him to take up litigation. Winning the Law without Walls competition against law students from all around the world is quite an accomplishment and do we really need another tax lawyer?

Despite being part of the "future," I will stick to teaching about law with walls. The type of walls found in courtrooms. I believe the adversary system of justice is one of mankind's greatest social inventions. While flawed, as all things human, it is a brilliant conception. This doesn't mean we shouldn't look at alternatives or other ways to improve the implementation of justice. My short experience in the Law without Walls program tells me it has a lot of worth.



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