

William & Mary Law School

William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository

Law School Personal Reflections on COVID-19

Law School Experiences of the COVID-19
Pandemic

Fall 2020

Associate Dean Laura N. Shepherd: Reflections on the Fall 2020 Semester

Laura N. Shepherd

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/covidwriting>



Part of the [Legal Education Commons](#), and the [Virus Diseases Commons](#)

Copyright c 2020 by the authors. This article is brought to you by the William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository.

<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/covidwriting>



Associate Dean Laura N. Shepherd

Reflections on the Fall 2020 Semester

Do you have any thoughts to share about how our students navigated this semester?

With resilience and grace. Everything about this semester was different, new, challenging, and unpredictable. Our students showed up and did what they always do, their best work! So many faced their own challenges themselves but they persevered. Our newest J.D. and LL.M. students had to begin their legal education at a school that was largely empty. Becoming part of the W&M Law community was especially different for our new students, yet they did it. I am so incredibly proud of all of them.

What aspects of your job were made especially challenging by pandemic conditions?

What aspects weren't?! Student support is what I do and translating that into a virtual reality was tough. It was hard to offer meaningful support to students, especially those who were struggling, through a computer screen. There is necessarily an element of humanity that does not translate in the virtual world.

It was also challenging to build relationships with students in the virtual world. When we are in the building, there are organic opportunities to get to know students, talk about their day, etc. Those spontaneous encounters allow me to build trust with students and that trust is the foundation of my work. Missing that was hard.

Any special kudos to individuals or groups who helped our community in a special way this semester?

Kudos? I have to start with Dean Spencer. His support of me and the work that I do was critical. Most people don't understand how challenging student services work is normally. Throw in a pandemic and time of social unrest in our country, and it is very difficult. Dean Spencer was very understanding of how sensitive this work is and the toll it can take. Of course, our students deserve kudos for just showing up every day. They are amazing.

And last but definitely not least, my awesome team! I would not have survived this insane semester without Donna Shelton, the Law Registrar, and Tiffany Goodman, the Assistant Law Registrar. There were so many adjustments that had to be made because of COVID-19 and they knocked each and every curve ball thrown at them out of the park. Not only did they do

whatever was asked of them but they both changed their vacation plans to get the job done (working many days late into the night). And this past July, Dean Spencer added Jennifer Franklin to the Student Services team as the Director of Academic Success and Bar Preparation. Jennifer hit the ground running and filled a void that was critical for our new students. And while they all work incredibly hard, I am especially grateful for the concern and care they have shown for me over the last several months. My team ROCKS!!!

Do you have hobbies or pastimes that have helped you combat pandemic fatigue?

I wish I did but I have not yet figured out how to combat pandemic fatigue. I probably need to work harder on that going forward.

Did you read or watch something for pleasure this semester that you would recommend to others?

I did not have much down time during the semester. (I have a 12-year-old in virtual 7th grade!) Since I also serve as the school's Chief Equity Officer, any time I have to read is devoted to that discipline. I am finishing up "Caste, The Origins of Our Discontent" by Isabel Wilkerson. This brilliant book explores the misperceptions about race in our country. I highly recommend it to everyone. The program I would recommend watching is "True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Inequality." This 2019 documentary highlights the work of Stevenson's Equal Justice Initiative and their tireless fight for the rights of poor, incarcerated people. Bryan Stevenson is my hero and this documentary inspired me to continue my own fight for equity and equality.