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Legal Skills Program (ca 1990's)

William & Mary Law School

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COMMENTS FROM FORMER LEGAL SKILLS STUDENTS



"Within my first week on the job I was approached by a partner who was on his way out of the building on an unexpected call. He explained that an out of town client would be arriving shortly to discuss the background facts of a potential claim, and that I was to conduct the initial interview. Thinking back on the types of questions I asked (and forgot to ask) in Legal Skills role-play interviews, I was able to avoid making many of the mistakes and omissions that are inevitable in a first attempt."

"I am now a much better writer than I was two years ago. I have become much more comfortable with the thought of spending a large amount of my time in the future drafting memoranda, letters, motions and the other mainstays of the legal profession...I also have become sensitive to the complex web of ethical relationships involving the legal system, clients and other lawyers..."

"From my first week at law school, Legal Skills has been a source of enjoyment and the vehicle for putting the abstract learning of other courses to good use...I believe that the basic friendliness and collegiality of Legal Skills has spilled over in part to the rest of the curriculum to the benefit of the classes and the students."

"The Legal Skills Program was invaluable to me as a Summer Associate at a medium-sized law firm (45 attorneys) in Washington, D.C. I was well ahead of the other summer associates in research ability and ability to deal with clients from the first week. Additionally, I was well-prepared for dealing with other summer associates by the 'team' approach used in the Legal Skills Program and for dealing with other attorneys in the superior/supervising positions."



EMPLOYERS EVALUATE THE LEGAL SKILLS PROGRAM



"The school's Legal Skills Program is remarkably innovative and I'm sure will prove to be of great benefit to the students."

"It (Legal Skills) certainly fills a great void in the legal education process, and prepares William and Mary School of Law graduates for many of the situations they will face as practicing attorneys."

"Based on my personal experiences in practice and my time spent in recruiting summer clerks and permanent associates, I believe William and Mary is to be commended on its innovative practice skills program...We find William and Mary students to be generally better prepared to begin practice and better able to handle the intellectual and emotional challenges in the practice of law..."

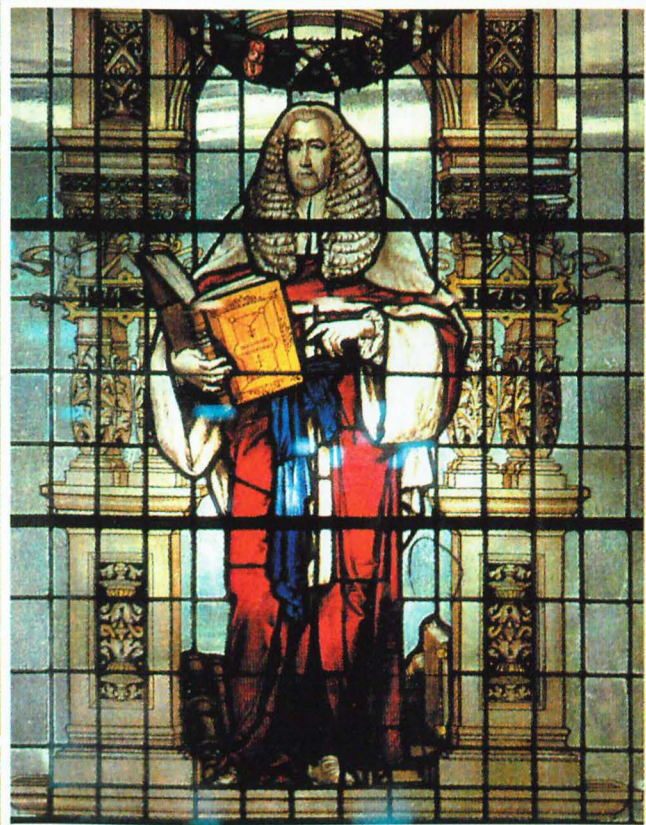
"I congratulate you on your dynamic and unique legal skills course. I expect this program explains why the William and Mary students who intern with us seem to have an easier time getting started and are prepared to do some practical tasks with less instruction than students from some other law schools."



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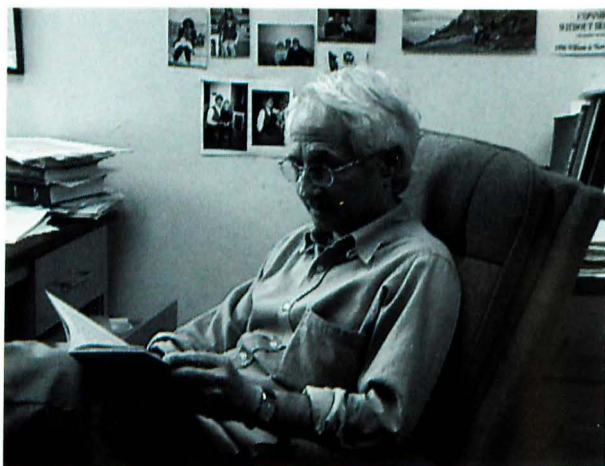
THE COLLEGE OF
WILLIAM AND MARY
SCHOOL OF LAW



LEGAL
SKILLS
PROGRAM



What does it really mean to be a lawyer? Beyond knowledge of the law, which skills are required to represent a client effectively? How do lawyers relate to one another as adversaries or as partners? How do good lawyers apply ethical principles in the practical world of everyday lawyering? These are important questions for both legal education and the profession; they also are questions that remain a mystery for most law students. At William and Mary, an innovative skills program helps provide answers in the most direct fashion; with due allowance for their neophyte status, our students assume the role of counselors at law. From the very first day, they begin to learn the real meaning of the phrase "a life in law."



Legal Skills at the College of William and Mary is a nine credit, two-year program of study that is required of all students. The program covers the following topics:

- History and Structure of the Legal Profession
- Professional Ethics
- Legal Research
- Legal Writing
- Legal Drafting
- Interviewing
- Negotiating
- Counseling
- Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Introduction to Trial Practice
- Introduction to Appellate Practice

At most law schools, these topics are treated in a varied mix of separate and unrelated courses. At William and Mary, using a wide range of original materials and teaching methods, they are unified in a realistic setting that helps students master essential lawyering skills and ethical concepts.

The Program begins with a challenging and intensive week of instruction designed to introduce the new student to both the legal system and law study.



Following the introductory week, the Program begins in earnest and on two concurrent tracks: classroom instruction and simulated client representation. These tracks are designed to provide both instruction in skills and ethics and the actual use of those skills in realistic settings that require the resolution of tough ethical issues.

The essential organizational unit of the Program is the law office. Each first-year student becomes one of a small group of approximately 15 associates in an office and remains part of that office for his or her first two years. A faculty member and a carefully selected third-year student are partners in the firm and provide guidance to the new associates. To ensure realism, each office is located in and uses the law of an actual jurisdiction, currently Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and California.

During the Program's two-year life, students are introduced to a wide range of required lawyering skills: interviewing and counseling, negotiating, researching and writing memoranda, drafting documents, opinion letters and briefs and arguing cases at trial and on appeal. All of these skills are learned through "hands on" experience representing simulated clients.



Two special features of the Program combine to make it a unique experience in American legal education. First, students deal with a client's problem from beginning to end. From the initial client interview through each step required by the representation, the student "lawyer" pursues the client's problem to a logical conclusion. Sometimes this conclusion is a negotiated settlement; other times it may mean a trial and appeal.

Whatever the outcome, the Program provides extraordinary, in-depth exposure to the skills being taught. Students, for example, who are engaged in a negotiation learn not only about negotiation but also about client interviewing and counseling because they have in fact interviewed and counseled the client to prepare for negotiation. Second, the Legal Skills Program is the Law School's course in legal professionalism and legal ethics. The Program emphasizes the value and importance of the lawyer's duties to the client, the justice system and the public. Ethical issues are treated in the context of client service, changing the character of the students' experience from mere competitive games to a much truer, better-textured learning experience.

A law school's skills program is the beginning student's first window on the legal profession. If well done, it provides a critical perspective on the study of law and what it means to be a lawyer. In this respect, William and Mary's Legal Skills Program is unique. It affords every student an opportunity to truly live a lawyer's life while attempting to master the basic skills required for an ethical and successful career in the law.

