

SHOWCASING STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP: THE SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON

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Student-edited law reviews speak to diverse audiences and serve multiple roles. Practitioners, judges, and law students utilize the invaluable information contained in the pages of law reviews. While law reviews are showcases for academic scholarship, they also are student organizations and commercial enterprises.

As a student organization, the law review has a duty to the law school community in which it operates. It should not be an elitist society for the chosen few; it should be an active organization seeking to promote the scholarship of faculty, law review members, and students by encouraging them to write the highest caliber of scholarship possible. The law review promotes the scholarship of the professors and students in its own campus community, thereby instilling a sense of pride in that community when its own exceptional scholarship is highlighted.

Student-edited law reviews also bear the extra burden of being student-managed businesses. As such, they have the formidable task of cultivating and retaining a subscribing readership of alumni, practitioners, judges, and libraries. The business-minded marketing editor is well aware that the law review's audience is much broader than the campus community and recognizes the need for strategic marketing tools. The law review's best marketing tool is a reputation for innovative and exceptional scholarship.

With all of these audiences and roles, how is a law review to best market itself to its readership, promote scholarship, and generate enthusiasm among those on campus? Inspired by the *Vanderbilt Law Review*, the *Stetson Law Review* found a forum that could involve students, student writers, faculty, staff, and practitioners from outside the Stetson community — the *Stetson Law Review* Scholarship Luncheon. The luncheon serves as a platform for

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promoting student scholarship, goodwill on campus, and interaction with other students and experts in various legal fields, all in the name of maintaining the highest standards of excellence.

THE PURPOSE

The scholarship luncheon is intended to meet several goals of the law review. First, it provides a student author with an opportunity to present his or her topic while it is still a work in progress. The simple act of verbalization can have a profound effect. Because an author becomes accustomed to reading his or her own words on the page over and over again, it is not until he or she orally presents the thesis of the paper to an audience who is unfamiliar with the particular topic that the author truly knows that his or her point is being conveyed with accuracy and clarity. The opportunity for input from the audience is invaluable as well. Probing questions from an expert in the field, as well as requests for clarification from a student who is unfamiliar with the particular area of the law, can be instrumental in shaping the work in progress.

Additionally, the luncheon serves as an opportunity for students, faculty, and staff, who normally do not participate in the publication process of the law review, to participate in a discussion of cutting-edge topics. This discussion and debate among luncheon attendees regarding the author's take on the particular topic also generates enthusiasm for the law review itself. The luncheon discussion gives the attendees an added incentive to pick up the law review when the topic presented is finally published and read the article to see how the final product evolved after the presentation. Ultimately, the scholarship luncheon fosters interest in the law review and prompts students attending the luncheon to ask how they too can become members.

Finally, the luncheon serves as an opportunity for alumni or other members of the legal community to serve as mentors for their future associates. Practitioners with expertise on the topic presented may be asked to speak at the luncheon and advise the author as his or her topic evolves. Because the luncheon is conveniently scheduled during the lunch hour, practitioners may choose to attend simply because of their interest in innovation in the law or for the opportunity to catch a glimpse of where the lawyers of tomorrow think the law may be headed and why.

THE FORMAT

The major goal of the scholarship luncheon is to allow the student author to receive feedback regarding the logical conclusions of his or her thesis statement. To accomplish this end, a student author who is at least one or two drafts into his or her article is chosen to participate. The student author is selected by a group of editors who evaluate interim drafts on the basis of originality, likelihood of publication, the appeal of the topic to a broad audience, and the interest and diligence that the student writer has shown in his or her writing.

Upon being notified that he or she has been selected to participate in the luncheon, the student then sets about securing the participation of faculty members, practitioners, or other individuals who have some expertise in the field about which the student author is writing. Because the idea is to make this a lunch hour event and to promote maximum attendance, a panel of two to three experts is reasonable. The student author should secure panel members well in advance and provide them with a copy of his or her most recent draft to review. Securing panelists early will allow the panelists to speak with the author prior to the luncheon itself.

The next task for the student is to prepare his or her presentation. The student must keep in mind that most of the audience will not be well versed in the subject matter and thus, any applicable precedent should be discussed before delving into the intricacies of the argument. Any visual aids conducive to the topic or contained within the article also should be presented. Showing these visual aids prior to the final draft of the paper will serve as a trial run to demonstrate whether such aids will make sense to the average reader. The presentation should begin with the student author's brief overview of the topic, keeping in mind that interaction from the panel and the audience, if time permits, is a top priority of the luncheon.

Once the student has introduced the topic adequately, the panel members are invited to ask the student questions. A student presenter may find that there are holes in the logic of his or her analysis, that the paper could be expanded in a direction that he or she had not considered, or that certain portions of his or her argument are difficult even for experts to understand. Sometimes, thoughtful panel members will toss out a "softball" question to get the dialogue between the panel and the presenter flowing, but

others will not be so inclined. Many law review articles center around controversial areas of the law, sometimes resulting in impassioned debate. It is advisable to designate a senior staff member or editor to moderate in the event that the debate becomes heated or one-sided.

After the experts have queried the student presenter, the presenter addresses questions from the audience. This question and answer session proves to be a great learning experience for all involved. It is one thing to field questions from an expert who has already read through a draft of the paper, but quite another to take questions from an audience member who is hearing your thesis for the first time. If the author has been careful to articulate his or her position with clarity, questions often will challenge that position, thus giving the author an opportunity to explore counterarguments that he or she had not considered before.

The fact that the area of law is not extremely familiar to the audience is a benefit for the author, because it will give him or her insight into what the average reader's reaction to the piece might be. Questions about issues that the author thought he or she thoroughly covered may indicate that the presentation of the issues is not as clear as it could be. This environment not only provides the student author with guidance in the writing of the next draft, it also serves as an opportunity for audience members to think critically about an innovative and scholarly work.

The author now has three sources from which to draw when he or she sits down to prepare the final draft. First, the author has his or her own thoughts on those points that did not make sense when presented orally. Second, the author has the insight of one or more experts in the field who may prompt exploration of an issue that compliments the article, but that the author had not previously considered. Third, the response of the audience may help the author to clarify the logic and presentation of the argument.

THE LUNCH

Even the lunch itself has some implications. For one thing, the average starving law student is apt to find time in his or her busy day for a free lunch (particularly if it is something other than pizza or submarine sandwiches). A simple buffet in the back of the auditorium allows people to enjoy lunch during the student presentation and even to sneak back for seconds during appropriate breaks in the action. At Stetson, the luncheon is somewhat formal.

The audience is seated comfortably at round banquet-style tables covered with linen tablecloths. Despite the fact that the event occurs during the school week, this lunch is special, which helps to add an air of importance and to make the presentation more memorable.

Once most attendees have gone through the buffet line and are seated comfortably, the moderator or editor in chief should explain how the presentation will proceed, at what point the audience may ask questions, and the purpose of the luncheon. By emphasizing that the work presented is still a work in progress and that the audience is invited to critique and suggest ways in which they think the article might be improved prior to publication, the audience remains interested and involved. These opening remarks also may be an appropriate time at which to introduce panel members so that, once the presentation begins, it can flow seamlessly.

THE MARKETING

Because attendance is important for the luncheon to accomplish its goals, ample notice of the event is essential. Many law review articles have witty or mysterious titles, so it is important that these titles are included in any notices about the luncheon. A short abstract of the article to be presented should be included in any advertisements, not only to pique interest, but also to inform audience members. Notices should promote distinguished panel members, the free meal, the student author's tireless work on this article, the fact that this article likely will be published, and that the community is invited to voice their opinions during the writing and publication process.

At Stetson, the luncheon is a mandatory event for law review members. The *Stetson Law Review* Scholarship Luncheon is now so successful that the *Law Review* takes RSVPs and actually has over-subscribed on some occasions. Members remind classmates, roommates, and professors that the luncheon is coming up and assure them that the topic is worthwhile. Special notice to professors who teach in areas that are relevant to the topic allows those professors to urge their students to attend in order to expand their viewpoint of that particular area of the law.

If panel members are members of the campus community, they too can tout their own participation in the luncheon to their students and colleagues and encourage them to attend. Professors who teach the first-year curriculum may promote the luncheon in their classes as a prime opportunity for their students to come and

see what the law review does and the kind of work that it produces. The law review also may use the luncheon as an opportunity to announce awards received by other members, thus providing award-winning students maximum exposure to their peers. Maximum exposure for the law review's successes also will garner even more interest in the law review. With the right publicity, the luncheon can be a well attended and successful event.

THE RESULT

The effects of a successful scholarship luncheon are many. The most far-reaching effect is perhaps the impact on the student author and his or her work. The opportunity to present a topic to a room of faculty, experts, administrators, and particularly peers, gives the student confidence that the topic is worthwhile. Even if problem areas are identified through the presentation process, the fact that the panel members and the audience show interest provides the student with new incentive to go back and conquer the final draft. The luncheon can create a new spark regarding a topic that has become stale after months of research and writing. Most important, the student has a fresh perspective from the legal community other than the editors on the law review or the faculty advisor.

The law school community as a whole gains a good feeling from the luncheon. It is inspiring to see "one of your own" artfully articulate an innovative legal theory. Students see that the classmate or the roommate who vanished into the depths of the library or the law review office did so for good reason. They now have incentive to pick up the law review and actually read the articles. Involving the entire campus community in even this small aspect of the publication process lets them feel that even though they may not participate in every step of the process, the law review truly is a student publication for all students, not just for the members of the law review staff.

Another advantage of the luncheon is the promotion of legal scholarship in general. First-year students may consider joining the law review after attending the luncheon. It may inspire second- and third-year students to finish that seminar paper they have been procrastinating about. The luncheon could generate ideas for a faculty member's next article. Furthermore, practitioners may be inspired to return to academia as an author for the law review, a student advisor, or even an adjunct professor. It is an important goal of the law review to promote legal scholarship of the highest

excellence. This is not only because the law review wants great works to grace the pages of its own publication, but also because innovative, and even controversial, scholarship is an important factor in the development of the law. Students and new lawyers should be encouraged to write about the direction the law is taking or should be taking. As the world changes, our system of law must change with it, and creative and novel legal theory through academic scholarship is one way we can hasten appropriate changes.

CONCLUSION

Every law review wants to promote academic scholarship, enhance its law school's reputation and campus life, and succeed as a business venture. With diverse readership, tight budgets, and strict publication schedules, these can be daunting goals. The scholarship luncheon has provided the *Stetson Law Review* with the means to encourage and improve student writing, bolster the *Law Review's* campus image, and involve alumni and the outside legal community at large. The benefits to the writer, the campus, and the law review as a marketable business are numerous.

The foregoing Essay provides a model that I am sure law reviews across the country could improve upon. I am confident that the *Stetson Law Review* will find ways to make the luncheon an even more profitable experience over time. But even "as is," the scholarship luncheon accomplishes the important goal of promoting, encouraging, and refining legal scholarship.