

PARALEGAL STUDIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 20, 2020 – Via Zoom

6:00pm-7:00pm

AGENDA

WELCOME:

Dean Susan Demers

College of Policy, Ethics, and Legal Studies

Dean Demers: Thank you everyone for being here this evening. I'd like to give you a thumbnail update as to how the decision was made to go online even though we were really face-to-face on everything. It was a challenging situation since we spent all these years training our students that we could only do face-to-face and we couldn't possibly go online because the ABA dictates that we be face-to-face. But the ABA relented because they didn't want students to lose a semester.

As a college, we had 1801 f2f classes to make the transition to being online. We were in a position a few days before break because northeastern schools were beginning to close down and so we had a back pocket plan as to how we might make the transition. During spring break, on Thursday of break, it became clear that we had to make a decision. The decision was made to extend Spring break two days. Our faculty essentially had Monday and Tuesday to convert everything into an online class and by Wednesday we came back to class with help from technology. We started working on making those f2f classes to online classes. It's taken a huge amount of work for all of our faculty members, lots of imagination and willingness to work through things. I won't tell you it's been completely seamless, but I will tell you that we're going to make it through to the end of the semester as a college.

We started back on March 18th, so we've been doing this for about a month. I do think we'll get most of our students across the finish line this semester, but as a college, between March 13th, which we've picked to be the date of the onset of this whole thing, through April 15th we have lost 2600 students out of our roughly 30,000 enrolled students this semester. That's what we are considering to be our Covid-19 casualty list. We had 2033 folks who were scheduled to graduate, if they successfully made it through the courses this semester. We've lost some of those so they are not going to graduate. We are now working to reach out to those people and try and get them across the finish line maybe over the summer.

We will be online for the summer and although we are advertising that in the Fall we will have f2f classes, no one knows for sure. It's our hope we will return in the fall but we will be prepared to offer those classes online again. The ABA's going to work with us on that, so we are just keeping score on who handles what along the way.

(Dean Demers shared a story about several of her students were appearing in a zoom class with children on their laps so they could pay attention to their class.)

I'll take questions from the crowd and then turn it over to Christy. (No questions.)

Dr. Powers: Thank you so much. Can you tell us before you leave what you've been doing lately in the college?

(Dean Demers explained about how she has been working first with Dr. Furlong during his interim tenure as VPAA. And then stepped in to be interim VPAA until July 1.)

Dr. Powers: I think we can all agree that you've been doing a wonderful job in the VP position.

One person who has joined us today is our Associate Dean, David Monroe. (Dr. Powers then gave some background on Dave's tenure at the college for 14 years, and has been part of the ethics department.)

ROLL CALL: **Dr. Christy Powers, Chair**

At this time, roll call was taken via presence in the Zoom Meeting.

PRESENT: Ian Banks, Joseph Benavides, Rachel Bennet, Susan Demers, Deborah Eldridge, Kaila Glaros, Candi James, Caitlein Jammo, Jason Nicholson, Christy Powers, Andy Sasso, Robert Schumaker, Vitalia Shafer, Melissa Solevilla, Jason Stearns, Ellen Poole, David Monroe

ABSENT: Heather Arbuckle, Iraya Bandaryk, Lisa Brody, Erika Hartman, Darryl Henderson, Kandice Hyatt, Anona Johnson, Laura Marx, Ellen Poole, Nathan Suedmeyer.

FOLLOW-UP FROM FALL MEETING:

-New AS Degree and Schedule Changes (launch Fall 2020)

Dr. Powers: Thanked everyone for being at the meeting.

A lot has happened since Spring Break. We are still going through our AS Degree program changes. We have taken 2 courses from two 16 week classes to one 16 week class and made sure that our subject matter experts were teaching the classes. Some students are in the midst of that transition, and it's working out for them because they are getting to take some of the other classes they would not have been able to take before. Thanks for your feedback and help in getting to this point.

Any questions? (No questions.)

-Essential Functions Checklist Review—Online Survey Taken in PLA 1003 Intro to Paralegalism

Another point I want to give a giant thank you is our Paralegal Essential Functions checklist. We had it reduced to a 4-page form with check boxes and signature line. Then we had it reduced to an online survey the students can take. It's deployed during the Intro class, and they have a learning plan breaking down their classes semester by semester in anticipation of a graduation date.

(Dr. Powers shared her screen with the group showing the survey to them.)

We're pleased with the response we've been getting in Intro. 15 Questions. Thank you for your input. We can share it with you when we send the meeting minutes. If you see anything you think should be changed, please let us know.

Any questions on the Essential Functions checklist? (No questions.)

COLLEGE-WIDE UPDATES:

Dr. Christy Powers

-COVID-19 Summer Online

Dr. Powers: Next up - Covid-19 Summer online. We have to report everything we are doing to run these LiveOnline classes to the ABA. The distinction I would like to explain to everyone is between Online and LiveOnline. LiveOnline is at a designated time when the students will interact with the professor in a manner such as this. With online classes the instructor will post different content that relates to other websites, worksheets, fact patterns. But for LiveOnline, the ABA needs to see that we are interacting with the students as if we were in a classroom setting.

We reduced our summer schedule to make sure that the classes we were holding sustain 10 weeks of live online learning. We did not offer Family Law this summer because we usually gather students together in the courtroom with the petitioner and respondent side in that space. So we will offer that course next summer.

Otherwise summer enrollment is really great. The students are happy to see an actual timeframe. So that's made a world of difference. So for the ABA we are asking our instructors to keep an hour-by-hour breakdown on how they plan to run four hours once a week.

We suggested to them four 50-minute teaching blocks with breakout rooms, team settings, etc. Some of our classes, like Constitution law, Insurance Law, Sports and Entertainment law, do you have any ideas of what we could do for this setting, for the four 50 minute teaching blocks? So

we are looking for some ideas for keeping the students engaged. What do you think we can do to keep them engaged for the time frame?

Dr. Bennett: Yes, but I think the question really is, if you had to meet with a client online for 3 or 4 hours, what would you do with them? Because that's the reality. We're trying to train paralegals to work with clients synchronously but online. So I would think we would like to see what some of you are doing in your law office, because you're working remotely and having to connect with people via video.

Jason Stearns: I know many of you in the room. So this is the new thing, what we are all doing. Some folks are taking business casual to the extreme. Some judges have a courtroom in the background. What is nice about this is so many of us are using technology in our practices because we wanted to, but some of the old guys didn't want to do it. They were reluctant to try it.

So I wondered if there were activities that were less formulated but still professional development for the students to engage in in a substantive, learning environment also incorporating various technology, backgrounds, dress code, everyone centered in the screen. There are some really great programs, mediation one of them. It's set for a mediation type courtroom, where you can actually have breakout rooms. Whoever is in charge, the judges or the mediator, lawyers, you can have virtual rooms. You can have exhibits. A lot of the court reporters that are into technology are taking depositions virtually. I think there is a lot here with virtual technology that would be useful.

Dr. Bennett: It's a great suggestion. To have conversations about being professional and the way it looks and feels, and the way to interact, that's a really great suggestion and one I haven't given much thought to.

Dean Demers: There's another opportunity to talk about all the security issues and how you can debug the security issues. Do you buy into the technology or do you look for another technology; the whole critical thinking piece about what kind of technology are you going to utilize? Maybe we could send them on the search for alternatives.

Jason Stearns: If somebody were teaching an IP course, there are a host of issues, property issues, licensing issues, copyright issues. This could be a course.

Candi James: One of the issues that we're dealing with is who can sign what document in which court; what type of documents, what type of signatures. We found ourselves in a place where a wet signature is not possible anymore. So what signatures are allowed? And of course, every jurisdiction is different, every court is different, so it's caused a lot of research for us. So that's

something that can be done too; is explore what jurisdictions will allow what changes that we have to learn to cope with.

Caitlein Jammo: At least from a Zoom mediation last week, I expected it to be a lot of downtime but it was a lot more of having to go, go, go. Because all of a sudden I'm getting emailed a document, and I'm trying to pull the document and trying to analyze it. If I'm in an in-person mediation, somebody would have handed me the document and I could have gone through it with my client there. And I think that you will see a lot of pressure on paralegals to really step up and jump in in those times, and maybe not only handle the analysis or reading through the document to find certain provisions, but also trying to get through the work.

The mediator I used was using his paralegal to maneuver the breakout rooms. Getting a handle on everything Jason mentioned in terms of presenting documents, whether it be at mediations, depositions, hearings, then you're going to see a lot more reliance on paralegals to be doing that as well on-the-fly kind of analysis.

So if you're looking for 50-minute blocks, it could be a breakout session at a mediation. Here's this agreement. I was looking at an insurance policy. They've now come up with a new argument you've never seen before. Can you find in the policy every time they talked about intended improvements or something like that?

Dean Demers: I was just going to make a suggestion: we could pass control of the session around and have somebody be the paralegal in charge of this 30 minutes and another be in charge of that 30 minutes and they do all the sharing and handling all the documents.

Caitlein Jammo: In the corporate world we are going to have our first-ever Zoom board meeting. And that includes locking people out of the Zoom session, but they have to wait in waiting rooms before they are invited into the session.

So it goes back to learning that technology. And you could do that easily in a class, where you lock out certain people for portions of the board meeting and let them in to do their presentations.

Ellen Poole: There would be an opportunity if you have these blocks to have more guest speakers come in. Because the platform allows for more people from farther away to engage in your class than you would otherwise have. I know I had an evening class and looking for somebody to come out after work might have been more difficult. Maybe now that classes are converting over to online there are more people that you can engage for that class and fill some of that time and keep it more exciting and engaging for the students, instead of just looking at you for the whole block.

Dean Demers: Right, or have two guest speakers who engage with each other? That would be almost impossible at any other point in time but this would be pretty easy to do in this kind of a situation.

Jason Stearns: I bet you guys would find more willing guest lecturers that now they only have to take an hour of their evening instead of the travel time in going to a classroom. It may even be easier for you to find guest lecturers. (Mr. Stearns share about his firm sponsoring the appellate advocacy.)

Caitlein Jammo: I would also just note - because I'm facing this tomorrow so it's on the top of my mind - a lot of hearings are happening telephonically, so preparing - whether it be attorneys or paralegals - to be able to present effectively. I would say most of the heavy lifting goes to paralegals, depending on how your office dynamic works, in terms of making sure the court's requirements are all coming up quickly and being developed as we are going along, making sure those pieces of the puzzle are filled as well as making sure it's effective. You've met the requirements, but what is going to be effective in establishing what you're trying to prove? So you could do Zoom without video, or have everyone there and then come back, that sort of thing for a 50-minute block.

Kaila Glaros: I would also say in terms of guest speakers that opens up the opportunity not just for people who couldn't normally get to your classroom setting, but people who live out of state as well. I do a paralegal panel of experts in my class, and next semester or term I'm going to try to get people from around the country to talk about different things as part of the paralegal panel. It's more than I would get with the 2 or 3 people locally.

Dr. Powers: These are all excellent ideas because that's what we need to hear and know. What should we be teaching our students right now, just outside of the norm of what we would do if we were in the classroom, to anticipate the change, the learning curve, the unknown? Because the first line of defense is the attorneys looking at the paralegal saying, you figure this out, you figure out how to record it, get the white board up, what are we doing here, how do we make sure certain people are in and certain people are out.

I think that there's a way we can incorporate that into certain classes. Like Law Office Management and Civil Litigation are very ripe for a lot of questions and concerns from students saying how am I going to thrive in this environment when I'm not face-to-face with these attorneys and in a law office with other paralegals as well, and not in an actual hearing where you're walking into a courtroom. That makes a big difference, not just the setting of it.

We really appreciate these ideas because there are a lot of things that we haven't really anticipated, but knowing what you all are anticipating and are currently doing really helps us train the next semesters of students. I know they are all craving it.

So we're trying to get ready for May 18th for the summer session to start. We need to know what we should be doing now to become employable in this time.

Any more offerings of suggestions? Like I said, our classes have a good showing. We're right about 68 – 70% for the upper and lower divisions. That's really great for the Summer seeing as we have three weeks out until classes start.

Candi James: I think current event discussions are always beneficial. As a paralegal, I need to read the news when I come in the office and see what's changed overnight. I work in bank regulatory and that's changing everyday right now. So I at least need some knowledge of what's happened overnight while I was working the day before so we can have those conversations, and know, maybe not what to do for today, but what's coming in the coming weeks. So those discussions about what's going on are helpful for each different line of defense in law.

Dr. Powers: Are there any other offerings of suggestions for what's in line for summer, and potentially fall when we have a full course load of different electives that we have to address? Obviously Health Care Law is going to have at least a week or two devoted to this topic. So we know that, and that's already an online course so that works.

Jason Stearns: I can't think of a substantive area of law that has not been affected by this. Whether it's regulatory and breach of contracts. In my firm it's a page of white papers, all the legal issues that everybody is asking. Labor and employment issues, what are you going to do - laying people off and furloughs? Every single arena I can think of has been implicated by this. I'm not saying that you should have a class called Covid and the Law.

(Dean Demers shared a story about the Rays and graduation arrangements.)

Dr. Powers: Thank you guys for sharing. And if you come up with anything that sounds like it would be pertinent, let us know. I've always liked the idea of white papers. And it might become something that we task students out with in certain classes, saying how we would handle this contract with a forced majeure clause, which is coming up in commercial pieces everywhere. People are taking what we would only study sometimes for the Bar Exam and now it becomes actual real life context. So it's kind of neat to see some of the issues that we are confronting. I've done white papers before in team settings and that has worked out well to kind of brainstorm and actually attack a current issue that is actually going on. So that's another great suggestion.

Dean Demers: I'm thinking about business interruption insurance and what the standard clauses are. I would love to take 5 or 6 different business interruption policies and see which ones are not really interrupted because of the way they write the definition, versus the ones where you are interrupted and the claim has to be paid. Just give them 5 or 6 businesses and try and do that particular interpretation exercise.

**PROGRAM UPDATES:
-ABA Documentation**

Dr. Christy Powers, Chair

Dr. Powers: As you know we've had to document all of this for the ABA. That's sort of a tedious process but a lot of our professors have found it helpful especially for Summer because it does force you to pre-plan out what you're going to do, seeing as how it's not Monday through Thursday 1-hour classes, but that one 4-hour block once a week. The good thing about Zoom is you can record the sessions.

The ABA wants us to take attendance to make sure that that interaction is still there. So they understand the nature of what we have to do and the directives we've been given. But we're really, on that learning curve of what to do to document everything. So when it comes to next year for our interim reporting period 2021, and we're probably going to have a little bit more bulky exhibits than we would normally, to report out the excellent job that our professors are doing. A lot of our spring professors we just launched right in. And it was great to see, when I checked in, they said, my paralegal is helping me so much. I said wow, I didn't know people were proficient in Zoom and Teams and everything. The attorney said, I didn't either. I said this is what we're doing and just do it. And they did. And a lot of them were our students. So it was great when we transitioned to this because the students were always up for it; they were ready; they said they were familiar; we've interacted with them like this before. We've seen a really good reception from our adjuncts and our full-time professors as well as our paralegal students.

DISCUSSION/SUGGESTIONS:

Dr. Christy Powers, Chair

-Open floor to committee for suggestions

Dr. Powers: I know we have some current professors online if you guys want to let us know how it's been going with the students to share the good, the bad, the ugly challenges and how you might have overcome them.

I'll offer one. (Dr. Powers shared about the challenges of not having a white board at first and how that affected her students.)

Dr. Powers: Any other success stories that other professors have seen this semester?

We will reach out to you probably in the fall again to get more assistance with the ABA reporting. They are going to be our guidance, but obviously they want to know that we're talking to you and that we are getting the feedback on how we should be running these courses

in this online setting. So I know a lot of us have been deferring to Zoom, Teams, but as we try to get more creative and understand what we're going to be facing with employability that's one thing that I know the students are going to be craving. And I'd like to open the floor to that.

What do you believe should be a new skill set or something else that the applicants should have on their resume, or work product that they could show, to evidence that they have this technology learning curve? Should they say that they are proficient in Zoom, Teams and other different types of software, support platforms for interaction? What do you guys think to make sure that we can start to beef up employability in these times?

Caitlein Jammo: I would say any of those, whether it be remote technology, more generally, and if they're in one or more of the multiple classes that there is a recording of, you could say, you're in charge of the class for this block of time. The student could say, these are examples of me manipulating Zoom; or me utilizing this in the resume, pursuant to what Professor Glaros allows in the resumes. I don't know how you would put that in the resume, but something along those lines. It never occurred to me that any of this was important until now. Now it's absolutely necessary. And I'm working with my assistant to see how we get witnesses sworn in when all three of us are in different locations.

Dr. Powers: With a lot of procedural and evidentiary concerns that we have, and we want to follow the rules of court as they change daily. So that is definitely important. We have students who say for the summer, I would really like to intern somewhere. What can I do remotely? How can I approach a law office; or I had something set up f2f and now they don't want to even try to work remotely with me.

Have you seen any surge in hiring for paralegals to just start to facilitate more of the remote legal services?

Jason Stearns: I can tell you from a law firm perspective, we've actually frozen our hiring efforts across the board. Not just paralegals; but paralegals, attorneys, lateral partners too. There's a lot of reasons for that. Right now with everything going on, every sector has been hit in the law firms. So I don't know that there can be an uptick, at least from my vantage point, and from what I've heard around, I don't think anybody's hiring.

I think what we are figuring out is everybody is getting repurposed. The person who had an office job that isn't there anymore, because they're not going into the office. I've got offices in Chicago, New York City, Richmond, and Tampa. We've got folks whose job literally no longer exists. They're not in the office. The person whose job was to courier in New York, or courier in Chicago, they don't have a job. So guess what they're doing, they are the Zoom meeting coordinator, or they're somebody else. So we're repurposing internally but I don't think we're hiring.

Melissa Solevilla: That's consistent with what I've seen as well, on the attorney Facebook networking groups where people have been brainstorming. Everybody is finding it more difficult to take interns. I know Professor Bennett had been soliciting, looking for some firms

willing to take interns and it's just tough. When we're trying to find our new norm, to take on any additional challenge or responsibility is tough, but it's going to start evolving.

I was wondering if you had found any firms willing to take interns.

Dr. Bennett: I was really pleased. I had several of my friends from law school reach out and say they have limited assignments. So I have this particular case, or I have this particular research, can you connect me with a student who can work on that. It's not, come be my intern for 6 months. It's better than getting no experience. They're still interacting with the attorney. They're still digging into the legal issues, dealing with the clients. But they are very surface-level things, because obviously they're concerned with confidentiality, and there's no orientation for these folks and it's kind of like a one-off; here's something you can do to get some hours. It's a little less substantive but it's better than nothing.

Melissa Solevilla: I'm glad you were able to find something. I do think the job market's going to become more and more challenging. I heard today about a firm that did a massive layoff. So I think the job market is going to be more and more challenging. So their resume is going to become even more important and their professionalism. But the way they can really get a step ahead is understanding this technology that we're all trying to learn and figure out. If they're coming out of school with this knowledge, heck I'll hire them.

Jason Stearns: I was going to say, everybody now is trying to figure out all this stuff, right. There's CLEs, there's training. I can tell you right now that if guys had paralegals who had a course, had taken a course on technology and the law and litigation and they can bring it to a law firm, this is the new normal. Even if they didn't have the course, if they had the initiative to come into a law firm and say, I'll be your intern and I'll figure out all this stuff. I was on the phone this morning, and said, how are you going to take this expert deposition? How are you going to do it, logistically? How are we going to get the exhibits to the person who is not in the same room as the court reporter or not in the same room as you?

So I think you could find a way for your students to be of value, the internship and what it brings.

Dr. Bennett: Fortunately one of the curriculum changes that we're making with combining Civil Lit I and II, is to have our students participate or complete a really robust software – how do I phrase this? They complete assignments on a huge variety of software programs, so I think that's headed in the right direction, but then it's up to the faculty to really target those extra things that obviously are kind of new and different because of the kind of climate we're in right now.

I have a question related to this. There are plenty of certifications available to students out there on specific topics, such as managing electronic discovery, or different related topics. Do you think those are going to become more and more important now that the market seems to be shifting a bit?

Melissa Sollevilla: I think that it would be appealing.

Dr. Bennett: We get some Perkins funding that might allow us to actually pay for that. So I'll reach out to Christy and see what's currently running. I think you're right. Resumes are going to have to look different. They're going to have to demonstrate a different skill set, for people to say this is really a solid investment for me to bring this person on.

Dr. Powers: Excellent. Thank you for your input on that. I know in a meeting like this to say where should we be placing people? Normally we would be saying, where is the need-based area? But now with downsizing, repurposing individuals, and when a firm does decide to hire, they're really going to be honing in on these technology skills and the ability to be very flexible while maintaining to the procedural rules.

I wanted to open the floor to any suggestions, remarks? I want to know how everybody is doing. I hope everyone is well.

Candi James: I wanted to make one point there, with the students who are making themselves familiar with this new technology and what that world looks like. As far as their professionalism goes, they need to remember that there's a whole group of people out there now that are using online Facebook Linked In – they need to make sure that their profiles out there are what they want their employers to see. Because now there are more employers and attorneys checking out those sites just to see, do they know how to use that software? Do they know how to socially engage? It's just something they need to keep in mind as they are getting those resumes ready.

Dr. Powers: Yes. Absolutely. Any other suggestions or comments concerns issues remarks?

Dr. Bennett: Thank you for your leadership, Christy. It's been kind of an interesting time. So I know you guys have been doing a lot of things behind the scenes to make things look seamless. We appreciate folks taking the time out to join us.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Dr. Christy Powers, Chair

Dr. Powers: Thank you Rachel. Thank you again for giving us your time this evening. We will send out this week the meeting minutes and the survey again for you guys to check out. Please keep in touch with us and let us know what we can do for you as well.