

# WHAT THE BEST LAW TEACHERS DO: A SURVEY FOLLOW-UP

Katrina Syrakos and Michael Hunter Schwartz\*

## CONTENTS

I. Introduction .....	529
II. Background/Summary of Previous Study .....	531
III. Results .....	541
A. Methodology .....	541
B. Summary of Findings .....	542
C. Personal Qualities and Characteristics .....	543
1. Kindness.....	543
2. Respectful and Caring Towards Students .....	545
3. Accessibility.....	547
4. Humility .....	548
5. Inspirational and Motivational.....	549
D. Classroom Expectations and Engagement .....	551
1. Preferred Teaching Method(s).....	553
a. Socratic-Style Questioning.....	556
b. Other Teaching Methods.....	557
2. Classroom Management.....	558
3. Difficult Topics .....	559
4. Flexibility .....	561
E. Creating an Inclusive Classroom Environment.....	561
F. Opportunities for Practice and Feedback .....	562
IV. Limitations of this Study .....	563
V. Concluding Thoughts .....	566
VI. Appendices.....	568
A. Solicitation Email .....	568
B. Survey Introduction and Consent Notice .....	569
C. Current Study Survey Questions .....	570

---

\* Katrina Syrakos is a third-year law student admitted to McGeorge School of Law's Accelerated Honors J.D. Program. Michael Hunter Schwartz is a Professor of Law at McGeorge School of Law and was the Dean of McGeorge from 2017 through 2025; he was one of three co-authors of *What*

## I. INTRODUCTION

We are honored to participate in Southwestern Law School's 2025 Law Review Symposium in honor of Professor Catherine Carpenter. Professor Carpenter has been a towering figure in legal education, an inspiration to law professors all over the country, and an important and transformative leader in the legal and legal education communities. Professor Schwartz has long regarded Professor Carpenter as an extraordinary educator, as evidenced by his choice to ask her to be a co-author of a Criminal Law casebook, now in its third edition,<sup>1</sup> for the Context and Practice casebook series Schwartz created.<sup>2</sup> Schwartz also considers Professor Carpenter a friend and role model.

The study we share here seemed like a wonderful way to honor Professor Carpenter's legacy as a teacher. Schwartz's choice to co-conduct the study with a student, Ms. Syrakos, and co-author the paper with that student is itself a tribute to the legacy of Professor Carpenter, who has always elevated students, found joy in teaching, and delivered excellence. Most of all, we wanted to do a project that we thought Professor Carpenter would want to read. Professor Carpenter's passion for students and their learning, and for the joy of teaching, led us to believe that a study of what excellent law teachers do would be of great interest to her.

Our survey project is a follow-up to the four-year, qualitative-method study presented in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*.<sup>3</sup> The authors, Schwartz, Professor Gerry Hess, and Professor Sophie Sparrow, conducted an in-depth study of the personal characteristics, habits of mind, teaching practices, innovations, and philosophies of some of the most effective law teachers across the United States.<sup>4</sup> This survey project is an effort to respond to those law faculty who expressed concern about the absence of survey data in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*. At the same time, neither of the authors of this

---

*the Best Law Teachers Do* (Harvard University Press 2013). Ms. Syrakos has served as Dean Schwartz's research assistant from summer 2024 to the present. Dean Schwartz thanks Catherine Carpenter for the inspiration, his *What the Best Law Teachers Do* co-authors, Sophie Sparrow and Gerry Hess, for their extraordinary work on that book and on other projects and for their inspirational teaching skills, and Ms. Syrakos, whom he regards as the best research assistant with whom he has ever worked.

1. See STEVEN FRIEDLAND ET AL., CRIMINAL LAW: A CONTEXT AND PRACTICE CASEBOOK (Carolina Academic Press, 3rd ed. 2024). For more information, see [https://cap-press.com/books/isbn/9781531029678/Criminal-Law-Third-Edition?srsId=AfmBOorQm6CXrMS3dOdR\\_8ca1e81GnVe87ZSVRq\\_uF51U8UMrXTpqGco](https://cap-press.com/books/isbn/9781531029678/Criminal-Law-Third-Edition?srsId=AfmBOorQm6CXrMS3dOdR_8ca1e81GnVe87ZSVRq_uF51U8UMrXTpqGco).

2. See CONTEXT AND PRACTICE SERIES (Michael Hunter Schwartz ed., Carolina Academic Press) (<https://cap-press.com/p/CAP>).

3. See MICHAEL HUNTER SCHWARTZ, GERALD F. HESS & SOPHIE M. SPARROW, WHAT THE BEST LAW TEACHERS DO (Harv. Univ. Press ed., 2013).

4. See *id.*

paper are social scientists. Consequently, we do not claim to be sharing the results of formal, best practices social science research, and our project might best be characterized as a pilot study.

Our hypothesis was that great law teaching transcends generations. We hypothesized that the personal qualities, expectations, classroom dynamics, efforts at creating an inclusive classroom, and relationships to their students, of the professors identified as important to law school learning by those who responded to our survey, would largely be the same as the professors studied for *What the Best Law Teachers Do*.

For the most part, as detailed in Part III of this article, we were right. The survey data indicates that the students' best teachers are quite similar to those featured in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*. According to the students who responded to our survey, the most transformative teachers, like the professors featured in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, have personal qualities and characteristics that invite students in.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, they are passionate about their subjects and student learning, and they are humble, inspirational, and caring.<sup>6</sup> The professors were also perceived to be "kind"; the responders to our survey seemed to value professor kindness more or more explicitly than the students interviewed for *What the Best Law Teachers Do*.<sup>7</sup>

According to the students who responded to our survey, the professors referenced in this study, like those studied for *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, have very high expectations for students in the sense that professors both ask their students to accomplish challenging tasks and communicate their certainty that their students will rise to the challenge.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the overwhelming majority of the responders to our survey described their most transformative professors as teaching courses that were among the students' more challenging courses in law school.<sup>9</sup> Students respond to these high expectations by pushing themselves to prepare hard for class; students indicate they prepare so hard because, at least in part, they do not want to disappoint their best teachers.<sup>10</sup>

The students who responded to our survey also highlighted many of the teaching principles and course design practices characteristic of the professors studied for *What the Best Law Teachers Do*. The best teachers

---

5. See Survey results from McGeorge Law School Students in Sacramento, California (2024) at 15 [hereinafter *Survey Results*].

6. *Id.* at 15.

7. *Id.* at 22.

8. *Id.* at 1.

9. *Id.*

10. *Id.* at 5.

referenced by survey responders focus more on teaching thinking skills and less on memorization.<sup>11</sup> They provide significant opportunities for practice and feedback.<sup>12</sup> They manifest sensitivity to topics that some students would find emotionally challenging or even painful, but contrary to the claims of some apocryphal authors, they do not eschew hard topics and do not necessarily provide content warnings.<sup>13</sup> The students' best teachers make an effort to vary their teaching techniques, but Socratic-style questioning is a core method for these teachers.<sup>14</sup> The professors also consciously make an effort to create an inclusive classroom culture.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the students report that their best teachers relate to them with respect and genuine interest in them.<sup>16</sup> Their best law teachers know their names and, in many instances, their backgrounds and interests.<sup>17</sup>

Part II of this paper is a short summary of the authors' findings in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*. This background shares the results of that study, which serves as the foundation for the creation of the authors' survey and a source of comparison data. In Part III, the authors detail the methodology of their study and then report the findings of the current study, discussing the significance of those findings, and comparing the findings to the results reported in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*.<sup>18</sup> In Part IV, the authors present an analysis of the limitations of the current study. Part V is a conclusion, offering a short discussion of lessons learned. Part VI includes Appendices consisting of the email solicitation of survey responses, the survey introduction and consent notice, and the survey questions.

## II. BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS STUDY

In 2013, one of the authors of this paper, Michael Hunter Schwartz, and his co-authors, Professors Gerald F. Hess and Sophie M. Sparrow, published *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, which details the teaching methods, personal characteristics, and focus on student learning of professors whose students achieve exceptional learning.<sup>19</sup> Readers are introduced to twenty-six professors from law schools across the United States who, along with more than 250 other professors, were nominated by the current and former

---

11. *Id.* at 4.

12. *Id.* at 8.

13. *Id.* at 7.

14. *Id.* at 6.

15. *Id.* at 20.

16. *Id.* at 2, 10.

17. *Id.* at 2, 22, 24.

18. HUNTER SCHWARTZ ET AL., *supra* note 3.

19. *Id.*

students whom they taught, then vetted and studied by the authors, and ultimately selected for inclusion in the study. The book that resulted detailed the insights, teaching techniques, relationship with and expectations of students, creativity, and the impact of these great teachers.

The study, the goal of which was to produce the first systematic, rigorous study of excellent law teaching, began in 2008 and concluded in 2012.<sup>20</sup> The study focused on professors whom the authors deemed “extraordinary law teachers,” defined as teachers who have a significant, positive, and long-term effect on their students.<sup>21</sup> To ensure that the subjects of the study were extraordinary law teachers who provide exceptional learning experiences for their students, the authors solicited nominations from their current and former law students.<sup>22</sup> Each subject was observed teaching, participated in extensive interviews, and shared their teaching materials.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the authors conducted focus groups with current and former students, examined student evaluations, reviewed nominees’ teaching philosophy statements, and evaluated testimonial letters.<sup>24</sup> The authors found that “the best [law] teachers distinguish themselves through their thoughtfulness, [care for] their students, high expectations, commitment to student learning, and ability to engage their students.”<sup>25</sup>

Exceptional learning, according to the authors, consists of two primary components: (1) exceptional intellectual development and (2) exceptional personal development.<sup>26</sup> This model was based on the working definition of exceptional learning developed in Ken Bain’s *What the Best College Teachers Do*.<sup>27</sup> After soliciting feedback regarding the definition of exceptional learning from those who were taking part in the nomination process, the following definition was developed for exceptional learning in legal education:

Exceptional teachers produce exceptional learning. Exceptional learning has two main components: exceptional intellectual development and exceptional personal development.

Exceptional intellectual development includes:

- Gaining deep, nuanced understanding of a sizeable body of legal doctrine, theory, and policy;

---

20. *Id.* at 2.

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.* at 1.

26. *Id.* at 24.

27. *Id.* at 23.

- Developing general lawyering skills (e.g., legal analysis and reasoning, case and statute reading, legal research, legal writing, policy analysis and synthesis, critical thinking);
- Developing specific law-practice skills, such as drafting legal documents (e.g., contracts, pleadings, briefs and memoranda) and interactive skills (e.g., negotiation, client counseling, oral advocacy, mediation, arbitration, trial advocacy, fact investigation); and
- Acquiring professional judgment, asking sophisticated questions, and applying concepts and skills to new problems, law practice, and life.

Exceptional personal development includes significant growth in:

- Understanding one's self (one's history, emotions, dispositions, abilities, insights, limitations, prejudices, assumptions) and what it means to be human;
- Gaining confidence, skill, and intrinsic motivation to grow beyond one's own expectations and to pursue lifelong learning;
- Developing a sense of responsibility to one's self and others (including moral development);
- Enhancing the ability to understand emotions and exercise compassion; and
- Developing professionalism and professional identity (e.g., values of the profession, purpose, and the thirst for justice).<sup>28</sup>

This definition allows readers of the study to better understand the skills and qualities that the subjects of the study embody and what they teach their students. The coverage of both intellectual and personal development reflects the balance that teachers must strive for in ensuring that their students learn foundational knowledge of core concepts and skills while also experiencing personal growth and self-understanding that will become a part of who they are.

Each of the subjects had unique teaching and outside-the-classroom practices, varied thinking processes, distinctive philosophies, and particular goals. The study highlighted and analyzed the commonalities that outweighed their differences.<sup>29</sup> The study was broken down into the following categories to reflect those commonalities: personal qualities, relational behaviors, expectations of students and themselves, class preparation, teaching activities, assessment efforts, and long-term effects.<sup>30</sup> Within each category, the authors provided an in-depth analysis of each

---

28. *Id.* at 35-36.

29. *Id.* at 16-17.

30. *Id.* at 16-22.

characteristic/behavior and explained the connection between each characteristic/behavior and exceptional teaching.

The most prominent personal qualities that extraordinary teachers in this study exhibited included thoughtfulness, authenticity, passion, enthusiasm, empathy, humility, and creativity.<sup>31</sup> This category served as the foundation for the authors' assertion that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher."<sup>32</sup> Thoughtfulness in this context encompasses consideration of all aspects of teaching, including how the professors think about their role, how they address mistakes, and how they plan classroom, reading assignment, and assessment logistics.<sup>33</sup> The subjects of the study were vulnerable and honest, which allowed the researchers to gain deep insight into the extensive thought processes, goals, and challenges of each. Examples detailed in the book include the following: using a variety of teaching methods, curating office layouts to create a welcoming environment, and manifesting an eagerness to grow and improve.<sup>34</sup> Through their thoughtfulness, extraordinary teachers inspire their students by exemplifying ways to engage with others in a professional setting. They artfully handle unexpected dilemmas (particularly during class where students observe the scenario from start to finish), and they exude awe over the fact that every class meeting and interaction is unique and special.<sup>35</sup> The extraordinary teachers have adopted provocative metaphors for their work as teachers, including making music, performing magic, and being on a journey, yet, at the same time, all of them articulated the transformative and evolving process of teaching.<sup>36</sup> One subject specifically noted that authenticity reflects the quality of genuineness, while others provided examples of sharing personal experiences, struggles, and successes with their students.<sup>37</sup> During interviews, students commented on the motivational aspect of their teachers' vulnerability and openness.<sup>38</sup>

The extraordinary teachers studied for the book are also passionate, enthusiastic, positive, and energetic both inside and outside of the classroom.<sup>39</sup> In addition to creating a more engaging and enduring environment, these characteristics humanized the teachers in the eyes of their

---

31. *Id.* at 17-18.

32. *Id.* at 17 (quoting PARKER J. PALMER, *THE COURAGE TO TEACH* (1998)).

33. *Id.* at 37-38.

34. *Id.* at 39-40.

35. *Id.* at 40-41.

36. *Id.* at 42.

37. *Id.* at 46.

38. *Id.* at 47.

39. *Id.* at 48-49.

students.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, they recognize that they are examples to their students every day.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, they choose to manifest empathy towards their students, clients, and parties in the cases discussed, provide valuable lessons for students, and create space in their classrooms for the students to be vulnerable too.<sup>42</sup> Humility is another common characteristic among these extraordinary teachers, most commonly exemplified in this study by how they engage with their students in the classroom.<sup>43</sup> Extraordinary teachers treat all questions as intelligent, admit when they do not know the answer to a question (often taking delight in such questions), and are relatable and not pretentious in discussions regarding their own accomplishments or expertise.<sup>44</sup> Extraordinary teachers feel responsible for the learning of their students, which results in students feeling actively engaged in their classes and office hours.<sup>45</sup> All of the law teachers studied for the book were, as might be expected, expert in their subjects.<sup>46</sup> However, the extraordinary teachers featured in the book stand out for their commitment to continuous improvement, eagerness for feedback from their students, and willingness to make adjustments as needed, a process they choose to repeat over and over throughout their careers.<sup>47</sup> They also inspire their students, both by how they live their lives and by how they do their work, and believe in the best version of their students, encouraging students to embrace ambition, confidence, and the aspects of who they are that make them unique.<sup>48</sup> This belief in each student often results in a transformative change in students' self-confidence, belief in their own capabilities, and success.<sup>49</sup>

These teachers begin relating to their students on the very first day of class and, in fact, many learn each student's name before the first day of class.<sup>50</sup> A common goal of extraordinary law teachers is to remove anonymity from the classroom, even in large classes.<sup>51</sup> This includes knowing the names of each student, as a bare minimum, and extends to knowing students' backgrounds, interests, and aspirations.<sup>52</sup> This active

---

40. *Id.* at 48-49.

41. *Id.* at 54-55.

42. *Id.* at 54-55.

43. *Id.* at 58-59.

44. *Id.* at 58-59.

45. *See id.* at 61-63.

46. *See id.* at 66-70.

47. *See id.* at 66-70.

48. *See id.* at 71-74.

49. *Id.* at 91.

50. *Id.* at 76.

51. *Id.* at 77.

52. *Id.* at 78.

genuine interest in relating to students helps to establish lasting mutual respect between teachers and students.<sup>53</sup> Equality in the treatment of students is also important to these extraordinary law teachers, demonstrated through genuine concern for all students and efforts to prevent any student from falling through the cracks.<sup>54</sup> They make it a point to be available, accessible, and approachable to students.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, they stand out in their efforts to assist with student learning, including offering extra sessions, working with student organizations, and participating in a range of service projects with their students.<sup>56</sup> Through these extra efforts, professors exemplify their view of students as collaborators, colleagues, and peers.<sup>57</sup> In turn, these professors become mentors for their students.<sup>58</sup> As a result, regardless of the courses they teach, they influence their students' professional development, relationships with future clients, and ethics.<sup>59</sup> Some professors provide explicit professionalism goals for their students; some highlight the importance of civility in the adversarial legal system; and others focus on client service, connection, and satisfaction.<sup>60</sup> Taking an active role in their students' career opportunities and choices, these professors facilitate career counseling, connections, and the establishment of community.<sup>61</sup>

These incredible law professors set high, achievable expectations that are balanced with care and respect.<sup>62</sup> The clear expectations of these professors set students up for successful class preparation and performance in class and on exams, as well as to "become effective professionals."<sup>63</sup> In balancing expectations of conceptual learning and deep analysis, effective teachers ensure that the amount of reading per each class is manageable.<sup>64</sup> These expectations, coupled with the firm belief and confidence that every student can excel, inspire preparation, engagement, and excellence from their

---

53. *See id.* at 81.

54. *See id.* at 86.

55. *Id.* at 97-98.

56. *Id.* at 102.

57. *Id.* at 105.

58. *Id.* at 108.

59. *Id.* at 114.

60. *See id.* at 114-16.

61. *Id.* at 117.

62. *See id.* at 124.

63. *Id.* at 127.

64. *Id.* at 143.

students.<sup>65</sup> This type of classroom culture usually implants a desire in students to not disappoint their teachers, peers, or themselves.<sup>66</sup>

Preparation is a significant aspect of teaching, just as it is a significant aspect of learning.<sup>67</sup> The amount of time spent on class preparation varies by person, but, consistently, the professors spent the same amount of time they would need as if they were teaching the class for the first time, even when they had been teaching it for years.<sup>68</sup> Re-preparation of the course materials each time they teach enables the professors to reflect upon their goals for the semester and set new goals each time they teach the class.<sup>69</sup> Such goals may be specific, relating to classroom environment, substantive understanding, and skills-based learning.<sup>70</sup> More broad ranging goals include teaching students how to learn in a law school setting, how to exercise proper judgment, and to generally get the most out of their lives.<sup>71</sup> In their detailed teaching plans, effective professors review the material from a student perspective.<sup>72</sup> These professors work to ensure that their reading assignments are reasonable, script questions, anticipate student questions, reflect upon what they know about teaching and learning, plan how to motivate and engage the students, and make conscious choices about how to use precious classroom time and organize the material.<sup>73</sup> Lastly, both before and after each class, extraordinary law professors reflect upon their teaching, taking into consideration the engagement of the students, any lingering questions or concepts to circle back to, and whether the class session met the goals they set.<sup>74</sup>

The in-classroom teaching strategies of the teachers featured in the book can be summarized as four core behaviors.<sup>75</sup> These professors “(1) consciously structure their class sessions to achieve their learning goals, (2) show they care about students, (3) make classes relevant, and (4) are extremely effective with their chosen teaching methods.”<sup>76</sup> Structuring classes to achieve learning goals means emphasizing goals to the students,

---

65. *Id.* at 131-34.

66. *See id.* at 137. Of course, this approach to motivating and inspiring students sharply contrasts with teaching tactics that use fear or intimidation.

67. *See id.* at 151.

68. *See id.*

69. *See id.* at 158.

70. *See id.* at 158-59.

71. *See id.* at 160-63.

72. *Id.* at 163-73.

73. *Id.* at 163-73.

74. *See id.* at 173-75.

75. *See id.* at 177.

76. *Id.*

focusing on student learning, maintaining consistent organization and structure, embracing flexibility, and demanding students' best efforts.<sup>77</sup> They make it a point to show that they care for their students by encouraging classroom participation and active and careful listening, showing genuine excitement regarding students' insights and questions, and by bringing energy, enthusiasm, humor, and fun to each class.<sup>78</sup> By ensuring that the material is significant and relevant, they make it easy for their students to connect with the material.<sup>79</sup> The law professors involved in this study highlighted the importance of creating and using current examples, as well as specifically connecting the course material to its law practice implications.<sup>80</sup> Universally, the teachers studied for the book excel in using their "chosen teaching techniques."<sup>81</sup> The techniques they use vary; some use role-plays and simulations, while others include drafting exercises and storytelling.<sup>82</sup> However, all emphasize and use active learning methods, facilitate community and collaboration, use silence well, and welcome diverse perspectives.<sup>83</sup> They all are creative, give clear explanations, effectively integrate visuals and technology, use repetition, and ensure variety.<sup>84</sup> Lastly, all of these teachers extend learning beyond the classroom, using office hours, course web pages, and e-mail communication, and they encourage their students to watch trials and oral arguments in local courthouses and to visit other legally-adjacent places, such as legislatures and public board meetings.<sup>85</sup>

All law professors encounter challenging issues in teaching their classes. The individuals studied for the book were particularly thoughtful and intentional with their approaches to addressing these issues, although, of course, not everything always goes as planned.<sup>86</sup> Common challenges at the time of the study included generally problematic student behavior, apparent lack of class preparation, inappropriate laptop use in class, and excessive cynicism from students.<sup>87</sup> Remaining authentic and honest, the subjects of

---

77. *See id.* at 178-86.

78. *Id.* at 187-93.

79. *See id.* at 194.

80. *Id.* at 197-200.

81. *Id.* at 205.

82. *Id.*

83. *Id.* at 211-21, 225.

84. *Id.* at 226-35.

85. *See id.* at 238-39.

86. *See id.* at 240.

87. *Id.* Based on Professor Schwartz's interactions with McGeorge School of Law students as a dean, his conversations with deans of other law schools, and his own teaching experiences in the

this study shared their approaches to questions for which they do not know the answers, how to minimize cheating, how they respond when a class session does not go well, how they address the constant challenge of balancing coverage and depth, and how they facilitate respectful and open discussions in the face of controversial or sensitive topics.<sup>88</sup> The professors approach all issues calmly and respectfully, while operating under the assumption of good faith regarding students' desires to do right and do well.<sup>89</sup> In response to lack of preparation for class, study participants' strategies range from reaching out via e-mail after class to check in with the student, coming back to the student in a future class (sometimes the very next class), and providing a "free pass" opportunity to students who disclose to the professor their lack of preparedness before the class period begins (usually not more than one pass per student per semester).<sup>90</sup> Their students consistently reported the importance of the professors acknowledging when they do not know the answer to a question posed, and some of them have a known (and beloved) practice of following up with the class to provide the answer once the professor has researched it.<sup>91</sup> Transparency is also key for class sessions that do not go well. The professors ask their students where they got lost in an analysis, acknowledge that there is a disconnect in understanding, and circle back to the class to ensure that everyone is on the same page.<sup>92</sup> When faced with sensitive or controversial topics, the professors encourage difference of opinion, support students in remaining calm, and foster respect among students.<sup>93</sup> One professor shared that when difference of opinion is not offered outright, they will ask students to channel a Supreme Court Justice's viewpoint to help bring a different opinion into the discussion.<sup>94</sup>

The professors were particularly mindful of the beginning and ending of class sessions and the courses they teach.<sup>95</sup> Many provide recaps of prior material, reiterating key concepts, helping students reorient themselves to the

---

past few years, issues relating to diversity, equity, inclusion, and systemic bias and complaints about peer-to-peer civility have increasingly become challenges.

88. *Id.* at 241.

89. *Id.*

90. *Id.* at 241-42. When Professor Schwartz studied Professor Hess's teaching in connection with the book, he learned that Professor Hess used a strategy that Professor Schwartz emulates to this day. In class, the professor moves on. After class, the professor emails the student and writes, "I notice you were unprepared for class today. What can I do to better inspire you to prepare for my class?"

91. *Id.* at 246.

92. *Id.* at 246-47.

93. *Id.* at 248-49.

94. *Id.* at 248-49.

95. *Id.* at 252.

material at hand, or share a related story or current event to emphasize the importance of the topic.<sup>96</sup> At the beginning and end of a course, teachers arguably have the greatest degree of student attention.<sup>97</sup> The professors studied for the book strategically use course beginnings to create community, establish trust and expectations, and facilitate a defining learning activity or interaction to set the tone for the remainder of the course.<sup>98</sup> Many incorporate a mix of substance and fun into the end of the course; final review sessions help students to prepare for exams, while a (sometimes separate, sometimes combined) celebration reminds students to acknowledge their success and progress and to enjoy themselves.<sup>99</sup>

Subjects of the study repeatedly emphasized the importance of integrating practice and feedback as part of the learning process.<sup>100</sup> They consistently provide students with varying types of practice opportunities (e.g., practice exams, role-plays, and hypotheticals) and forms of feedback (e.g., oral or written, presented individually or within small groups).<sup>101</sup> Many provide practice exams with sample answers.<sup>102</sup> However, not all professors embrace this approach, with one taking the opposite approach (students have access to prior exams but not sample answers) in the hope that students will put more effort into their own answers when taking practice exams.<sup>103</sup> In critiquing students' work, the professors in this study varied how they balanced positive feedback with constructive criticism.<sup>104</sup> The majority focus almost exclusively on positives and are specific regarding what students are doing well, while other professors work to balance positive and constructive feedback.<sup>105</sup> The assessments are challenging but also fair, and the professors are transparent with their exam instructions, question prompts, and evaluations.<sup>106</sup> Multiple and creative approaches to grading, particularly given mandatory grading curves in most law schools, help to ease some of the students' anxiety and stress.<sup>107</sup> Some ensure that students' grades did not depend solely on their final exams (e.g., midterms, small writing

---

96. *Id.* at 252-53.

97. *Id.* at 253.

98. *Id.* at 253-55.

99. *Id.* at 256-57.

100. *Id.* at 261.

101. *Id.* at 260-63.

102. *Id.* at 266.

103. *Id.* at 267.

104. *Id.* at 274.

105. *Id.* at 275.

106. *Id.* at 276-77.

107. *Id.* at 280-81.

assignments, quizzes, participation), provide opportunities for extra credit, and even create opportunities to appeal a test grade to the professor.<sup>108</sup>

Lasting lessons that students take away from these professors were divided into two categories of exceptional learning in legal education: (1) intellectual and (2) personal development.<sup>109</sup> Regarding legal doctrine, students' lasting learning primarily revolves around frameworks and principles.<sup>110</sup> Regarding general skills, students report lasting learning of careful reading, attention to detail, analysis, and problem solving.<sup>111</sup> Students also reported exposure to different fields of law and niche practice areas, sometimes inspiring career trajectories that otherwise may never have been discovered.<sup>112</sup> The professors believe students also gain mastery and development of legal doctrine, including underlying policy concepts, common critiques, and areas for improvement, and the professors strive to help students see how they may develop the law throughout their own practices.<sup>113</sup> Students resonate with, are inspired by, and strive to embody both personal characteristics and interpersonal values that are exemplified by their professors.<sup>114</sup> These personal characteristics include passion, excellence, humility, and confidence.<sup>115</sup> The interpersonal qualities most frequently mentioned by students are humanity and respect.<sup>116</sup>

In short, the extraordinary law professors studied in *What the Best Law Teachers Do* have a profound, lasting impact on their students.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Methodology

As noted above, this project began with the investigators' hypothesis that transformative law teaching transcends generations. We hypothesized that the personal qualities, expectations, classroom dynamics, efforts at creating an inclusive classroom, and relationships to their students of the professors described by those who responded to our survey would largely be the same as the professors studied for *What the Best Law Teachers Do*.

---

108. *Id.*

109. *Id.* at 287-88.

110. *Id.* at 291-92.

111. *Id.* at 293.

112. *Id.* at 292.

113. *Id.* at 288-89.

114. *Id.* at 302.

115. *Id.*

116. *Id.* at 305.

The investigators first secured human subjects approval to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board of the law school's parent university (the University of the Pacific).<sup>117</sup> Then, the investigators designed a survey and arranged for it to be distributed electronically to all second, third, and fourth-year students attending McGeorge, as well as the 2024 J.D. graduation class, a total of 488 students and (new) McGeorge alumni.<sup>118</sup> The law school's Dean of Students emailed the survey to the students and did not identify either of the investigators out of concern that a request from the law school's dean might distort the data in some unanticipated way. The survey consisted of four open-answer prompts and ten multiple-choice questions with four answer options each. Each multiple-choice question included an optional text box to allow survey respondents to share additional or clarifying information.

Sixty-four (13.1%) of the 488 students to whom the survey was sent completed the survey. For each multiple-choice question, approximately ten to fifteen respondents used the optional text box.<sup>119</sup> Many of these optional responses are incorporated below and directly quoted.<sup>120</sup> Many of the respondents chose to answer one or more of the open-ended questions, and several of those responses are also incorporated below.

### B. Summary of Findings

For the most part, the survey data indicates that the respondents' best teachers are quite similar to the teachers featured in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*. The survey respondents, like the students and alumni interviewed for *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, reported that their most transformative professors have personal qualities that invite students in.<sup>121</sup> These qualities include passion for their subjects and student learning, humility, ability to inspire, and actively showing their students that they care.<sup>122</sup> A distinction between the studies is that the survey respondents particularly emphasized the importance of kindness.<sup>123</sup> Lastly, the students

---

117. See Appendices *infra* Part VI (for a copy of the solicitation email, survey introduction and consent notice, and list of survey questions).

118. Appendices *infra* Part VI.

119. *Survey Results*, *supra* note 5. The only exception is that nineteen optional responses were submitted with multiple choice question number eight.

120. See Limitations *infra* Part IV (for a full discussion of the potential limitations of this study).

121. See Personal Qualities and Characteristics *infra* Part III(C).

122. See Personal Qualities and Characteristics *infra* Part III(C).

123. See Kindness *infra* Part III(C)(1).

report that their best teachers relate to them with respect and communicate genuine interest in them as individuals.<sup>124</sup>

Both the professors referenced in this study and those professors studied for *What the Best Law Teachers Do* have very high expectations for students. The professors ask their students to accomplish challenging tasks and communicate their certainty that their students will rise to the challenge.<sup>125</sup> Notably, the overwhelming majority of the respondents to our survey described their most transformative professors as teaching courses that were among the students' more challenging courses in law school.<sup>126</sup> Students consistently respond to these high expectations as motivating and, therefore, push themselves to prepare for every class.<sup>127</sup>

Similarities were also reflected in both groups of professors' teaching principles, teaching techniques, and course design practices. Like the professors featured in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, the survey respondents' best teachers focus more on teaching thinking skills and less on memorization.<sup>128</sup> These professors also provide significant opportunities for practice and feedback, make efforts to vary their teaching techniques, and consciously endeavor to create an inclusive classroom culture.<sup>129</sup>

The remaining subsections of this part of the paper flesh out these findings and are organized into the following subsections: (1) Personal Qualities and Characteristics, (2) Classroom Expectations and Engagement, (3) Creating an Inclusive Classroom Environment, and (4) Opportunities for Practice and Feedback.

### C. *Personal Qualities and Characteristics*

The most salient personal qualities and characteristics that survey respondents emphasized were their best teachers' kindness, humility, inspirational nature, accessibility, and caring and respectful way of interacting with their students.

#### 1. Kindness

As noted above, to a greater degree than the students and alumni interviewed for *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, the survey respondents

---

124. See Respectful and Caring *infra* Part III(C)(2).

125. See Kindness *infra* Part III(C)(1).

126. See Classroom Expectations and Engagement *infra* Part III(D).

127. See Inspirational and Motivational *infra* Part III(C)(5).

128. See Classroom Expectations and Engagement *infra* Part III(D).

129. See Classroom Expectations and Engagement, Creating an Inclusive Classroom, Opportunities for Practice and Feedback *infra* Parts III(D)-(F).

particularly emphasized kindness as a characteristic of extraordinary law professors. For example, survey respondents rated kindness as just as important to the students' learning as challenging students to do difficult work and communicating that students were capable of excellent work. Specifically, in response to a question asking about what "was most significant" to encouraging the respondents to do their best work, 21/64 (32.8%) chose "being kind and supportive," 20/64 (31.3%) chose "challenging me to respond to difficult questions and tasks," and 19/64 (29.7%) chose "communicating that I am capable of extraordinary work."<sup>130</sup>

The focus on kindness also can be seen in students' supplemental responses. One supplemental response reported that kindness is particularly important to the current generation of students, "[t]oday's generation expects kindness, not guilt or criticism--most of us find that demoralizing and demotivating."<sup>131</sup> Another respondent, who seemed to value being asked challenging questions, added this important caveat: "Challenging students to [answer] difficult questions but NOT disrespecting them when they are incorrect is very important."<sup>132</sup> A third respondent wrote that their professor "[h]as a really nice demeanor and is very open to questions."<sup>133</sup>

Because this follow-up study was conducted more than ten years after the study detailed in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, i.e., a decade ago but less than a generation later, the apparent elevated importance of kindness reflected in the survey responses is interesting and noteworthy but not conclusive. Moreover, this difference might be a feature of labeling; many of the qualities addressed in *What the Best Law Teachers Do* might be characterized as reflecting kindness, such as being supportive of students,<sup>134</sup> knowing students' names,<sup>135</sup> and knowing students as individuals.<sup>136</sup> For purposes of this article, the investigators coined a separate category, respectful and caring towards students, which includes being supportive, knowing students' names, and knowing students as individuals. The distinction between the two categories is that respect and care, as detailed immediately below, reflect active steps taken by professors, and kindness is more of a static quality.<sup>137</sup>

---

130. *Survey Results*, *supra* note 5, at 1 (4/64 (6.3%) chose "pushing me by communicating that I could do better.").

131. *Id.*

132. *Id.*

133. *Id.* at 11.

134. *Id.* at 91.

135. HUNTER SCHWARTZ ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 78.

136. *Id.*

137. The investigators note another distinction between these two categories: the source of the data. The comments focusing on kindness were in supplemental responses to the referenced

## 2. Respectful and Caring Towards Students

The survey respondents report that their most transformative professors manifest respect and care towards students by investing time in their own preparation for class, office hours, and their other interactions with students. Furthermore, these professors genuinely encourage student questions, know their students' names and the proper pronunciation of those names, and communicate that they greatly value student experiences prior to and outside of law school.

Ensuring that students are learning is a key component of the professor's investment in their students. Survey respondents were asked to "think of the professor who did the best job of communicating the professor's investment in your success" and choose the option that was most significant to them.<sup>138</sup> The plurality of respondents, 31/64 (48.4%), chose "[b]y making sure my peers and I are learning."<sup>139</sup> The remaining options reflected other characteristics detailed above. Specifically, 12/64 (18.8%) chose "[b]y being available and accessible," 11/64 (17.2%) chose "[b]y knowing me as an individual," and 10/64 (15.6%) chose "[b]y communicating respect for my experiences in the world."<sup>140</sup>

One key way the respondents' best professors manifested their investment in their students is by the time they spent providing practice and feedback;<sup>141</sup> those efforts are explored in greater detail in the section below on practice and feedback.

The two quotes below exemplify how students translate professor investment of time into a student experience that the professor respects and cares for them:

Fundamentally, my most effective professors are different from my other professors because the most effective ones give the strongest impression that they truly care about me as a student and are invested in my success. Their actions match this impression when they provide supplemental study materials, take extra time in office hours, give thorough feedback on exams and papers, and encourage students to put forth their best effort and ask for help when they need it.<sup>142</sup>

---

multiple choice question while the comments regarding respect and caring came primarily from the open answer responses. The kindness data might simply be a distortion caused by the fact that the investigators including kindness as an answer choice.

138. *Survey Results*, *supra* note 5, at 2.

139. *Id.*

140. *Id.*

141. *See* Opportunities for Practice and Feedback *infra* Part III(F).

142. *Survey Results*, *supra* note 5, at 16.

A professor that really stuck with me took time outside of class during our 1L year to host a 1L summer job workshop and Q/A. It was completely outside his “responsibilities” as a professor, yet he took the time to do it. The fact he cared enough to help us find our way before embarking on 1L summer made me feel way more prepared.<sup>143</sup>

Encouragement of student questions and interactions, both inside and outside the classroom, led to many respondents’ belief that their professors respect and care for their students. The respondents’ most effective professors embrace the process of helping students get better responses to in-class questions when the students’ initial response is not correct. Rather than embarrassing their students, the respondents’ best professors communicate their respect for the students by manifesting their belief in the students’ capabilities by helping the students respond better. One respondent shared how their most effective professor exemplified this quality: “When students get a wrong answer, they do not shut us down but try to steer us in the correct way[; these professors do] not make cold calling that bad, [and they try] to ease [the stress of] public speaking.”<sup>144</sup>

Another respondent shared that their most effective professor “[a]sked difficult questions and gave us room to make mistakes.”<sup>145</sup> Echoing this sentiment, a different respondent shared that their most effective professor “[s]peaks very nicely to us and [does] not put us down for not knowing the answers or getting the wrong answer.”<sup>146</sup> Even incorrect answers can increase the value of the conversation and learning experience for everyone. As articulated by one respondent: “The best professor[s] organically amplify the educational or professional value of an assignment or discussion by responding directly to the student’s contributions and making them feel heard by echoing their efforts.”<sup>147</sup>

In short, the most transformative professors recognize the contributions that students make at every stage of their learning process. One respondent exemplified this by saying, “[n]ot only did they view us capable of learning, but as [individuals] who could make valuable contributions to the discussion even with our limited knowledge.”<sup>148</sup> This process of guiding students extends beyond the classroom. Outside the classroom, for example,

---

143. *Id.* at 27.

144. *Id.* at 11.

145. *Id.* at 22.

146. *Id.* at 21.

147. *Id.* at 26.

148. *Id.* at 3.

“[d]uring office hours, they allow me to work through the materials myself by guiding the conversation.”<sup>149</sup>

Office hours are critical opportunities for professors to encourage their students to ask questions and to get to know their students. Even just listening is impactful for students, as one respondent shared, “They truly care about their students. They have time available in office hours to listen to their students.”<sup>150</sup> Listening to students may also foster familiarity with their experiences and who they are as individuals. As one respondent articulated:

[T]hose that were truly impactful allowed us to have in-depth office hour discussions. They also made you feel like a complete person. I wasn’t just a law student -- they asked how I was doing, if I was doing anything fun for the weekend, they asked about pets who appeared on my zoom calls, etc. It made me feel comfortable sharing my questions and concerns with them.<sup>151</sup>

Familiarity with students’ names and experiences was also important to the survey respondents. “Learning and using everyone’s names” helps ensure that students feel seen as individuals.<sup>152</sup> Correct pronunciation of those names is important. One respondent applauded their most effective professors for “learn[ing] all student names and pronounc[ing] them well, even when there are 60+ students in the class” while another respondent highlighted the importance of “mak[ing] an effort to pronounce everyone’s names correctly (even if they don’t get it right every time, at least make an effort).”<sup>153</sup> Additionally, the students’ most transformative professors go even deeper; they “acknowledge people’s life experiences before law school or outside the classroom.”<sup>154</sup> These efforts make the respondents’ best professors more accessible, as the next section details.

### 3. Accessibility

The investigators particularly appreciated the very clear way that one respondent explained the importance of accessibility: “[T]o me, accessibility is both practical (e.g., present in office, responsive to emails, available after class for questions, etc.) and relational (e.g., kind, respectful, and not acting rushed or inconvenienced by students).”<sup>155</sup>

The way that the respondents’ best teachers conducted office hours was a common focus in respondents’ explanations of how their most effective law

---

149. *Id.* at 13.

150. *Id.*

151. *Id.* at 17.

152. *Id.* at 22.

153. *Id.* at 22-23.

154. *Id.* at 21.

155. *Id.* at 2.

professors exemplified accessibility. Specifically, respondents highlighted the importance of regular office hours in providing opportunities for one-on-one conversation and connections with their professors. Additionally, one respondent shared a tactic employed by their most effective law professors in making relevant discussions during office hours accessible to the entire class.<sup>156</sup> The student reported that, when their professor has a particularly enlightening or substantive conversation with a student regarding the material during office hours, the professor shares the knowledge with the entire class during the next class session.<sup>157</sup>

Another respondent addressed all the various ways their best professors made themselves accessible.<sup>158</sup> They explained that their professors “assured the class of their accessibility by being available for office hours, responsive to emails, courteous in lecture, and even sharing their cell phone number on occasion.”<sup>159</sup>

Professors’ demeanors are important to students’ experience in terms of accessibility. Professors who consciously make time for “allowing for questions during class” are perceived to be more accessible.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, as one respondent explained, their professor’s “patience when I don’t understand a concept” was critical to creating students’ sense that their professors were accessible.<sup>161</sup> Directly linking accessibility to approachability, one respondent shared that their most effective professors are “approachable and seem genuinely happy when students have questions and need clarification.”<sup>162</sup> A particular facet of the respondents’ best professors’ demeanor is their humility, as explained in the next section.

#### 4. Humility

A number of survey respondents expressly mentioned humility as an important quality of their best teachers. One student’s comments are particularly insightful and consistent with the data in *What the Best Law Teachers Do* that suggests the best teachers are humble:

An effective professor is humble; they understand they have more knowledge than their students, yet don’t allow that to make the students feel beneath them. They also relate what we’re learning to the real world - they

---

156. *Id.* at 10.

157. *Id.*

158. *Id.* at 21.

159. *Id.* at 21.

160. *Id.* at 24.

161. *Id.* at 24.

162. *Id.* at 19.

help us understand what we're learning goes well beyond the walls of the classroom.<sup>163</sup>

A second respondent wrote:

[Y]ou can learn [a lot] from the professors about the stories they choose to share about their own lives and careers. [T]he professors that had some kind of practice or career before usually have more impactful stories that have stuck with me or colored in a memorable way, an area of law that otherwise would not have stood out to me before. Empathy, humility, advocacy, righteous anger on behalf of your client!<sup>164</sup>

A third respondent wrote that a lasting lesson they learned from their best law teacher was to “[a]pproach the law with humility.”<sup>165</sup> Another respondent quoted a professor in a way that shows the professor’s humility; the professor said, “[I]f you don’t understand my answer, it is my job to phrase it in a way that makes sense to you.”<sup>166</sup> This student-centered approach, among other things, makes the professors inspirational and motivational, as detailed in the next section.

## 5. Inspirational and Motivational

The responders also reported that their most transformative law professors inspire them to strive for excellence both during law school and beyond. One particularly appreciated their most transformative professor “[c]onveying their belief that we will lead the future of the profession in a powerfully positive direction.”<sup>167</sup> Another respondent shared what the respondent reported were meaningful words from their professor: “That I can make a positive impact on the world by educating myself, and [I am] capable of rising to the challenges of the profession.”<sup>168</sup>

Through both words and actions, the students’ most effective professors inspire lessons that students regard as lasting, including to “[b]e kind, be professional, work hard but most importantly be you and you will be happier.”<sup>169</sup> These professors specifically “lead by example.”<sup>170</sup> Echoing these sentiments, another respondent shared that the life lessons encouraged by professors “stayed with me [because these professors] demonstrat[ed] kindness, compassion, patience, and professionalism in and out of the

---

163. *Id.* at 12.

164. *Id.* at 28.

165. *Id.* at 25, 13.

166. *Id.* at 25, 13.

167. *Id.* at 3.

168. *Id.* at 28.

169. *Id.* at 27.

170. *Id.*

classroom.”<sup>171</sup> Linking inspiration and teaching methods, one respondent explained that “[t]he most effective professors go out of their way to provide [practice-applicable] anecdotes and stories to make us appreciate the academic undertaking we are on and make us feel like our learning has immediate practical value.”<sup>172</sup>

A few respondents emphasized how encouragement from their professors both inspired and motivated them to succeed. One respondent shared, “My most effective professor was encouraging. But it was 1:1 encouragement. I felt like they actually believed in me[,] and they made me feel like I was actually worthy of being in law school.”<sup>173</sup> Another respondent shared the words and impact of their most effective professor: “‘You have the skills to make [] a good lawyer.’ He repeated [this] in class several times and acknowledged how real and valid the feelings the students have about an assignment or the future in general.”<sup>174</sup>

One respondent noted how their professor’s passion for the course was contagious and helpful to their learning experience. “They are extremely knowledgeable in their field and show that they are not only passionate about it, but passionate about teaching it and really want me to understand the material. This is shown in their patience and making themselves available to discuss the material.”<sup>175</sup>

A few respondents shared that their class preparation was greatly influenced by their desire to show respect towards their greatest professors. Some comments included, “I wanted to impress the professors I respected most,” and “I wanted to be prepared out of respect for my professor and the effort he put into each class.”<sup>176</sup> Another respondent expressed “a feeling of guilt letting these professors down” by not preparing for every class with their best effort.<sup>177</sup> In sum, as one respondent explained, “I did my best work for these professors because I didn’t want to let them down and I wanted to show them the same respect and care they showed us.”<sup>178</sup>

The responses to a multiple-choice question asking about their attitude towards class preparation for classes taught by their best professors provide statistical support for the above conclusions, many of which were quoted from the supplemental responses to the question. In total, 44/64 (68.8%) did

---

171. *Id.* at 25.

172. *Id.* at 16.

173. *Id.* at 18.

174. *Id.* at 26.

175. *Id.* at 15.

176. *Id.* at 5.

177. *Id.*

178. *Id.*

their “best to always be prepared,” 12/64 (18.8%) “would never be unprepared,” 6/64 (9.4%) “tried to be prepared for most class sessions,” and 2/64 (3.1%) “did not worry about it.”<sup>179</sup>

It is also worth noting that, for the respondents, relating to students should not be confused with knowing them on a personal level. Ultimately, 40/64 (62.5%) of the respondents indicated that their most effective professors know them “as an individual” only “decently,” as compared to 11/64 (17.2%) responding “deeply,” 9/64 (1.4%) “not at all,” and 4/64 (0.6%) “either personally or professionally only.”<sup>180</sup>

As noted above, while all of the foregoing traits and behaviors demonstrate professors’ investment in students’ success, “making sure my peers are and I are learning” was the most important.<sup>181</sup> These data suggest that professors’ classroom expectations and engagement, as detailed in the next section, play a critical part in students’ experiences.

#### *D. Classroom Expectations and Engagement*

The responses to several of the multiple-choice questions in the survey indicate that the respondents regard communication of classroom expectations and engagement as vital to effective teaching. As previously stated, in response to a question asking about “what was most significant” to encouraging the respondents to do their best work, 20/64 (31.3%) chose “[c]hallenging me to respond to difficult questions and tasks,” and 19/64 (29.7%) chose “[c]ommunicating that I am capable of extraordinary work.”<sup>182</sup>

The survey results indicate that high expectations and course difficulty lead to a more fulfilling and transformative learning experience. When asked how difficult the courses taught by their most transformative professors were, 58/64 (90.6%) of respondents confirmed that their most transformative professors taught either their most difficult course or a course that was among their most difficult courses in law school.<sup>183</sup> One supplemental response to that question read, “[t]heir class required thinking instead of just memorization,” suggesting that the deep learning that accompanies a more difficult course leads to a more transformative learning experience.<sup>184</sup> One respondent explained that “[e]xpecting a lot from students but providing

---

179. *Id.* at 4.

180. *Id.* at 9.

181. *Id.* at 2.

182. *Id.* at 1 (4/64 (6.3%) chose “pushing me by communicating that I could do better.”).

183. *Id.* at 3-4 (Specifically, 10/64 (15.6%) chose “my hardest class in law school,” while 48/64 (75%) chose “among my harder classes in law school.”).

184. *Id.* at 4.

them with the resources needed to succeed and respect in their attempts to [succeed] [leads to the] most effective law school environment.”<sup>185</sup> Another respondent indicated that “[t]he more challenging and stimulating the class, the better I will be prepared.”<sup>186</sup>

Additionally, the way that great professors view their students in the classroom significantly affects students’ learning experience. When asked how they most appreciate being viewed by professors, 32/64 (50%) of respondents prefer to be viewed as “students capable of learning,” as opposed to 6/64 (9.4%) who chose “mentees,” 10/64 (15.6%) who chose “attorneys already,” or 16/64 (25%) “as colleagues who have not yet learned everything the professor knows.”<sup>187</sup>

The most effective professors encourage engagement and embrace questions from students. As one respondent shared:

My most effective professor had open and honest communication with students about her grading and expectations. Further, she never felt insulted if you asked a question 10 times because you didn’t understand the answer . . . she did not make it seem like it was our fault for not understanding something if we were truly working towards that understanding.<sup>188</sup>

Such engagement creates an atmosphere where students are comfortable enough, according to one respondent, to “walk through [their] train of thought.”<sup>189</sup> This factor, in turn, enables all students in the class to benefit from different perspectives and ways of thinking.

The respondents perceived that their professors not only provide clarity regarding their expectations but also choose to explain why they select particular teaching method(s) or learning experiences for students and how the concepts that the students are learning will translate into practice. One respondent expressed these ideas together by explaining that their best professor would “tell me what they want me to do and why they want me to do it and how doing it that way will strengthen my abilities as a future attorney.”<sup>190</sup>

In addition to having high expectations for their students, the most effective professors also have high expectations for themselves and make sure they are well-prepared for class. One respondent noted that “The most effective professors come to class 30 minutes early [and] have ALL THE

---

185. *Id.*

186. *Id.* at 5.

187. *Id.* at 3.

188. *Id.* at 13.

189. *Id.* at 1.

190. *Id.* at 11.

TECH SET UP,”<sup>191</sup> eliminating the need to spend precious class time resolving technical issues.

Lastly, the respondents reported that their best law professors facilitate rigorous learning: “These classes were very difficult and on a subject matter basis and rigor, they would be my hardest. But because these professors were available, gave us power points and worksheets, I was able to focus on learning the subject matter.”<sup>192</sup>

While this discussion focuses on how the professors’ expectations make their classes extraordinary, the following sections focus on the respondents’ most transformative professors’ teaching methods.

### 1. Preferred Teaching Method(s)

Respondents emphasized a variety of teaching-related practices that were important to their learning and valued in their most effective teachers. Respondents appreciate that their best teachers provide practical context, were organized, and were efficient in how they articulated concepts. One respondent, for example, noted that their “most effective professor creates a laid-back but engaging classroom environment, and provides real practice examples to put rules and issues into practical context.”<sup>193</sup> Another respondent appreciated “how organized they were at presenting the topics.”<sup>194</sup> Many mentioned their best professors’ ability to clearly articulate the law, including how professors “simplify complex concepts which allows students to learn the material quicker, and then build on that foundation to include more complex material,” and the general ability to “articulate[] the hardest concepts in law . . . precisely and simply.”<sup>195</sup> Another shared that their “most effective professor helps to clarify the rules and then encourages analysis. They help me to understand by explaining the basic, core concepts and THEN delving into the nitty-gritty and the nuance.”<sup>196</sup>

Respondents also acknowledge how their most effective professors help to facilitate connections between the materials and concepts via effective classroom explanations. These explanations are vital because, as one respondent pointed out, “[c]ases don’t teach material in a well-rounded manner.”<sup>197</sup> Additionally, effective professors do not forget to illustrate these connections. Comparing their most effective professor to other professors,

---

191. *Id.* at 14.

192. *Id.* at 4.

193. *Id.* at 12.

194. *Id.* at 5.

195. *Id.* at 11, 6.

196. *Id.* at 13.

197. *Id.* at 6.

one respondent stated, “I believe other professors might be so familiar with the subject matter that the inferences they consider apparent are lost on those new to the subject.”<sup>198</sup> Another respondent articulated this point by sharing how their most effective professor: “Allows for questions from students and clearly and concisely answers. Doesn’t assume that students come in with an understanding of the subject on the first day of class, they start with the very basics and then build[] upon that.”<sup>199</sup>

The survey results indicate that the students’ best teachers are clear and effective explainers. When asked what made their most effective classroom professors so effective in the classroom, clear explanations were preferred at least twice as much as each competing option. Specifically, 34/64 (53.1%) chose “[h]ow effective the professor(s) were in explaining what the professor(s) were teaching,” 15/64 (23.4%) chose “enthusiasm for student learning of the professor(s),” 12/64 (18.8%) chose “enthusiasm for the subject of the professor(s),” and 3/64 (4.7%) chose “[h]ow organized the professor(s) were.”<sup>200</sup> These data suggest that, while organization and enthusiasm (both for student learning and the subject matter) are important to students, they pale in comparison to effective explanations. As one supplemental response articulated, “Effectiveness of explanations and enthusiasm for the subject go hand in hand with effective storytelling - make it applicable and relatable!”<sup>201</sup>

Another theme that arose was professors’ abilities to create a big picture view of the material and how everything fits together conceptually. Two respondents eloquently communicated their professors’ success in this aspect:

They create a logical map of the course throughout the semester. By map [I] mean that they set the concepts into a larger scheme for the course and illuminate how those concepts operate intrinsically and in the larger scheme as well.<sup>202</sup>

And:

The steps to evaluate a contract have always stuck with me because my professor used the same slide all semester that showed all the steps as well as where we were in our learning at that time . . . . Knowing what our end goal was from the start helped ground my understanding rather than

---

198. *Id.* at 15.

199. *Id.* at 11.

200. *Id.* at 5.

201. *Id.*

202. *Id.* at 15.

learning one piece and hoping we will understand how that piece fits into our potentially wrong idea of what the end goal is.<sup>203</sup>

Spending sufficient time on a particular topic that is generally difficult for students to digest or reviewing prior material is also helpful to students. For example, some professors “incorporate a recap from the last class into the class schedule” and know which “portions of the material are especially difficult for students usually, and hammer[] it into us until we should reasonably get it.”<sup>204</sup>

Another theme is the importance of practical application of what the students are learning. One respondent shared that material grounded in practical reality (regular practice) provides much needed context and facilitates lasting learning.<sup>205</sup> Another respondent shared, “I’ve found that the lessons that stay with me from my professor are ones which they put into context and compare to real practice.”<sup>206</sup>

Respondents also have much to say regarding particular teaching methods. When asked what teaching techniques their most transformative professors used, 27/64 (42.2%) chose “Socratic-style questioning and lecturing roughly in balanced amounts,” 16/64 (25%) chose “[m]any teaching techniques,” 13/64 (20.3%) chose “[m]ostly lecture,” and 8/64 (12.5%) chose “[m]ostly Socratic-style questioning.”<sup>207</sup> In other words, there is no evidence that, to be a transformative law teacher, a professor must adopt a particular approach to teaching, but more than half the respondents’ best teachers use multiple methods in their teaching.

In respondents’ supplemental responses regarding the teaching methods question, they share a large number of examples of how their most effective teachers use Socratic-style questions in their teaching, and they describe a wide variety of other teaching methods used by their most effective teachers. Accordingly, the discussion below reports the results in those two categories: Socratic-style questioning<sup>208</sup> and Other Teaching Methods.

---

203. *Id.* at 29.

204. *Id.* at 19.

205. *Id.* at 11.

206. *Id.* at 28.

207. *Id.* at 6.

208. Like many teaching and learning scholars, we acknowledge that what happens in law school classrooms is more accurately described as “Socratic-style questioning” than as the “Socratic method,” which was devised by Socrates and involves questions that delve into the bases for students’ beliefs and opinions. Law School Socratic-Style Questioning is less far reaching and more targeted. See Kris Franklin & Doni Gewirtzman, *Socratic Questioning in the Law School Classroom*, N.Y.U., [https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload\\_documents/Socratic%20Tidbit%20draft%203\\_0.pdf](https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/Socratic%20Tidbit%20draft%203_0.pdf) (last visited Mar. 12, 2025).

*a. Socratic-Style Questioning*

Socratic-style questioning, a hallmark of all law school experiences, received mixed reviews in the survey results. The respondents described very different experiences and preferences regarding Socratic-style questioning. Many respondents associate the method with cold calling, while others report that their most effective professors create on-call panels or allow voluntary participation.

One benefit of the method, according to respondents, is that it helps students conceptualize the knowledge that they have and sometimes even discover that they understood more than they realized. One respondent shared that pushing students to conceptualize concepts via Socratic-style questioning is beneficial “even when a student thinks they don’t know the answer.”<sup>209</sup> When this occurs, the most effective professors “ask[] questions to prompt them and usually the student ends up knowing more than they thought they did.”<sup>210</sup> On the other hand, some effective professors push their students via the method by giving them a break to sort their thoughts and then returning to the same student later. One respondent shared how their most effective professor effectively used the method:

Alternating cold calling between individuals when one person has trouble answering a question . . . [and] encouraging the student to arrive at their own conclusions by focusing on hypotheticals, [switching] up the facts, and coming back to students who are having trouble after they have had time to think through the issue.<sup>211</sup>

Respondents also expressed frustration that Socratic-style questioning can be inefficient, and, as one respondent pointed out, “[q]uick cold calls and moving through students fast helps the class move along.”<sup>212</sup>

Another respondent reflected upon how the method helps students to prepare for practice. They shared their view that: “We need to teach [in this way] because students need to know how to confront anxiety. Computer screens create a way to avoid anxiety. Lawyers or at least good attorneys need to be prepared to argue and listen. Socratic teaching is a must in law school.”<sup>213</sup>

---

209. *Survey Results*, *supra* note 5, at 12.

210. *Id.*

211. *Id.* at 11.

212. *Id.* at 6.

213. *Id.*

*b. Other Teaching Methods*

The respondents detailed a wide variety of other teaching methods that their most effective law professors employ, including pair sharing, role playing, group work, structured opportunities for practice and feedback, and others. Respondents consistently reported that “lots of engagement” is vital, commending their professors for “[a]dding activities [to] the classroom.”<sup>214</sup> One respondent shared a few examples of how their most effective professor was engaging with students and the materials and said that the class was enlivened by the professor, “making the law relatable through explaining the real-world context or contextualizing it to something the students can relate to.”<sup>215</sup> Another respondent appreciated that their professor requires students to think from different perspectives by the creation of “real-world scenarios where classmates interact and serve as different interests.”<sup>216</sup> A respondent highlighted the importance of “actual activities where students have their ideas challenged” so that students get the most out of these experiences.<sup>217</sup>

The respondents believe that using a variety of teaching methods facilitates learning with a wider variety of students. One respondent shared their immense appreciation “[w]hen professors provide exercises that appeal to all learning types (including video links, diagrams in slides, and discussion activities).”<sup>218</sup> Sharing their personal experiences, another respondent stated: “I learn best with direct instruction and transparent expectations, and even more so when professors use [power points], practice exams, in-class quizzes, and supplemental materials to support students’ understanding.”<sup>219</sup>

Another student shared that their most effective professor:

[P]rovides students with concrete activities to do in class which illustrates a given concept we are learning. She provides us with wonderful research engines and resources. She provides insight from her own experience as a practicing attorney. Very concise in her explanations. She teaches students how to write and provides examples of effective writing and ineffective writing.<sup>220</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly to some professors, the respondents value group work and role-playing. One respondent noted, “I usually hate group projects, but in law school it has shown me how to collaborate with my peers . . . .”<sup>221</sup>

---

214. *Id.* at 19.

215. *Id.*

216. *Id.* at 12.

217. *Id.* at 24.

218. *Id.* at 21.

219. *Id.* at 10.

220. *Id.* at 15.

221. *Id.* at 18.

Another respondent shared more unique activities where their professors “were able to create games, competitions, and even acting scenes that included either the whole class or some students. Even when only some students were used for the exercise, the entire class felt included because it was usually funny [and engaging].”<sup>222</sup> Another respondent shared their preference for “interactive and less pressure environments” including “hypos on the board with placards with the letters of the answer choices” and “group discussions.”<sup>223</sup> Another respondent shared their delight of “physically getting out of my chair and going in front of the class to help illustrate my professor[’s] concept.”<sup>224</sup> In sum, as one respondent stated, “[t]he most effective professor caters to different learning styles.”<sup>225</sup>

Ultimately, the most effective law professors are “enthusiastic about the material and directly engage with students to facilitate discussion, rather than just lecturing or asking basic questions about the holding, issue, etc. They also create opportunities for the students to apply whatever they’re learning in a simulation or a hypothetical.”<sup>226</sup>

In the next section, we make it clear that great teaching, according to the respondents, is more than a matter of technique; the respondents’ best teachers carefully manage their limited classroom time with their students.

## 2. Classroom Management

Respondents highlighted their most effective professors’ ability to maintain respectful control over the class and the ability to curate a welcoming and engaging environment. One respondent articulated that the ideal classroom environment is one that embodies a “healthy, open, and comfortable learning environment.”<sup>227</sup> Such an environment enables students to “not . . . feel intimidated or embarrassed to ask questions.”<sup>228</sup> Another respondent applauded their most effective professor for “foster[ing] an environment that makes being wrong not a big deal in class, as long as we work towards the best answer.”<sup>229</sup>

Maintaining a delicate balance between encouraging responses and managing classroom time to focus on the most important facets of their courses is critical and difficult, but the respondents’ most effective teachers

---

222. *Id.* at 25.

223. *Id.* at 24.

224. *Id.* at 26.

225. *Id.* at 14.

226. *Id.* at 17.

227. *Id.* at 11.

228. *Id.*

229. *Id.* at 12.

succeed. One respondent shared that their most effective professor exhibits the:

[A]bility to control classroom discussion so as to not lend [excessive] class time to the theoretical musings of classmates. My most effective professors do this without demeaning anyone but by simply reminding them that class time is a valuable asset and should not be spent pontificating about one's personal experiences and opinions regarding the law.<sup>230</sup>

Professors also manage classroom time through careful planning and by keeping the class on track and focusing on the material that is a priority to learn. One respondent referred to this as “pre-load[ing] information in advance, for example, telling us that the case we will be reading might bring up secondary issues [that would otherwise distract from the material at hand and] to just ignore those.”<sup>231</sup> The next section details the strategies the respondents' best professors use to manage difficult topics in general.

### 3. Difficult topics

Survey respondents were asked to consider how their most effective professors handle “sensitive or controversial issues” and share what was “most significant to the professor(s) success.”<sup>232</sup> Clear communication, regarding both “expectations for speaking and listening,” 27/64 (42.2%) and “sensitivity to students' feelings and reactions,” 25/64 (39.1%), were the students' two top choices.<sup>233</sup> In comparison, only 8/64 (12.5%) chose “content warnings,” and only 4/64 (6.3%) chose “[r]espond immediately if a student acted inappropriately or became visibly upset.”<sup>234</sup> These results indicate that the creation of an atmosphere with boundaries and guidelines is the best way for professors to handle difficult topics. Along the same vein, students seem to appreciate a more proactive than reactive approach to sensitive topics.

Respondents endorsed their most effective professors' guidelines for such conversations, including: “[a]llowing all viewpoints as long as they communicate respect for all present, focusing the discussion and not letting it stray too far off-topic.”<sup>235</sup> A few students flagged the importance of voluntary participation for difficult topics, including “not cold calling for especially sensitive topics,” making “discussions voluntary when [the] topic

---

230. *Id.* at 16.

231. *Id.* at 18.

232. *Id.* at 7.

233. *Id.*

234. *Id.*

235. *Id.*

was extremely sensitive,” and not “ask[ing] insensitive questions or pos[ing] insensitive discussion topics.”<sup>236</sup>

It is important to note that, while the respondents desire sensitivity, their most effective professors nevertheless cover even the most challenging of topics. In the words of one respondent, these professors “[a]cknowledge controversial topics but still discuss them.”<sup>237</sup>

Effective professors also actively create space for their students to discuss difficult topics if they choose. One respondent describes their professor as someone who “leans into difficult conversations that are on students’ mind[s], and does a great job making space for all voices and perspectives.”<sup>238</sup> Another respondent shared that their most effective professor takes more of a “back seat” by “starting with class discussion about the topic before jumping [into] the material.”<sup>239</sup> This same respondent further reflected, “I think this helps students feel in control of the dialogue and decreases the tension.”<sup>240</sup> One respondent shared a potential way to balance civility and critical thinking by instructing students to “[p]lease keep the comments respectful, but don’t be afraid to analyze and explore these topics.”<sup>241</sup>

Students do not wholeheartedly expect content warnings, as the data demonstrate, but students still recognize the value of such warnings. The most effective professors do not need to provide content warnings, but some do anyway. One respondent reflected on their professor’s success in combining content warnings with expectations, expressing appreciation for the fact that their best professor provided a “content warning via email the day before - but still setting an expectation to come to class.”<sup>242</sup>

One respondent characterized the law school experience in a way that would be familiar to recent McGeorge students: law school is a “[b]rave space” as opposed to a “safe space.”<sup>243</sup> This distinction and discussion is embraced as part of the McGeorge orientation process. The phrase “brave space, not safe space” embodies the acknowledgement that the law deals with painful and traumatic mistreatment of human beings by other human beings, meaning that it cannot truly be a safe space, but students can make it a brave space by showing up and not shying away from these sensitive topics.

---

236. *Id.* at 8.

237. *Id.* at 22.

238. *Id.* at 12.

239. *Id.* at 8.

240. *Id.*

241. *Id.* at 22.

242. *Id.* at 7.

243. *Id.*

#### 4. Flexibility

Multiple survey respondents shared that their most effective professors take temperatures of the classroom by asking how the students are doing with understanding the material. Closely related is the pace of the class discussion. One respondent articulated this balance as the “speed at which lecture progresses is efficient, yet ensures that students have the time needed to understand before moving on to the next slide/subject.”<sup>244</sup> “[A] willingness to reassess the progress of the class instead of rushing materials” allows for effective professors to take note of the best pace for the class as a whole.<sup>245</sup> When their professors make it a point to adjust the pace of the class to ensure learning, respondents recognize that their professors “prioritize the understanding of the students. They take note when the class is struggling with a concept even if they don’t expect us [to] and they take the time needed to further explain or clear it up.”<sup>246</sup> Likewise, flexible professors “take questions DURING their lecture,” a practice that ensures that fewer students are left behind.<sup>247</sup>

#### E. Creating an Inclusive Classroom Environment

Although inclusivity is a facet of classroom expectations and engagement, the investigators recognize the emerging importance of creating inclusive classrooms and campuses. Accordingly, survey respondents were asked, “What, if anything, has/have your most effective professor(s) done to create an inclusive classroom atmosphere?”<sup>248</sup>

The students explained that their most effective professors “equally embrace all students.”<sup>249</sup> Along these same lines, many professors make a point to actively “us[e] [students’] preferred pronouns, and eliminat[e] bias from their mind.”<sup>250</sup> Additionally, the most effective professors intentionally create space for “[u]nderstanding and challenging assumptions or arguments no matter which political or cultural direction they may come from.”<sup>251</sup>

The most effective professors did not shy away from acknowledging different cultures, viewpoints, and disproportionate impacts of the law. One respondent specifically shared that their most effective professor is

---

244. *Id.* at 13.

245. *Id.* at 17.

246. *Id.* at 16.

247. *Id.*

248. *Id.* at 20; Appendix C *infra*. Part VI.

249. *Survey Results, supra* note 5, at 24.

250. *Id.*

251. *Id.* at 21.

“inclusive of all cultures and talk[s] about other cultures and their appreciation.”<sup>252</sup> Another respondent shared that “it feels like the professor really cares and is engaged in the material when they talk about how the law might disproportionately affect a certain group,”<sup>253</sup> demonstrating awareness and encouraging the class to do the same. Another way effective professors bring awareness and reflection to the class is by asking their students “to reflect not only on the cases’ impacts on legal analysis but on our society at large.”<sup>254</sup> Taking a step back to acknowledge where course material fits into the scheme of the legal field in general is also impactful for students, as one respondent pointed out: “Deep discussion of important core beliefs and values are what have made lessons stick out. Taking it back to basic legal questions (freedom, punishment/rehabilitation, fairness, equity etc.) can make even the most mundane topics feel weighty and important.”<sup>255</sup>

Another respondent shared the importance of accessibility of materials to inclusion:

The most effective professors understand that assigned material might not necessarily be accessible for all students and provide optional supplemental sources that ensure that the concepts are presented in several ways. When professors go out of their way to endorse audio or textual supplements it makes me feel that the professor cares about various learning types.<sup>256</sup>

#### *F. Opportunities for Practice and Feedback*

A multiple choice question asked respondents to reflect upon the professors “who most helped you grow your skills as a future lawyer” and to choose the answer that was “most important to your growth.” Ultimately, 27/64 (42.2%) chose “[o]pportunities for practice and feedback,” 16/64 (25%) chose “[d]emonstration on how to perform skills,” 13/64 (20.3%) chose “[o]ne-on-one meetings to review your work,” and 8/64 (12.5%) chose “[d]etailed, line-by-line feedback on your work.”<sup>257</sup>

Earlier in this article, we discussed the investment of time as evidence of how much professors respect and care for students.<sup>258</sup> Investment of time is also directly correlated with practice and feedback, as the respondent quotes below exemplify:

---

252. *Id.* at 23.

253. *Id.* at 24.

254. *Id.* at 27.

255. *Id.* at 30.

256. *Id.* at 11.

257. *Id.* at 8.

258. *See* Respectful and Caring Towards Students *supra* Part III(C)(2).

One of my professors held individualized office hours post-midterms to teach us how to write a law school exam and how we could have improved our midterm. We blocked out our exam number of course, but he invested so much of his free time to help us.

. . . .

Work[ing] in the legal clinics helped me practice how to be a lawyer under strict supervision, but with a lot of responsibility, and was vital to me becoming the legal professional and future lawyer I am today!

. . . .

A lesson that stands out to me is when she was teaching us about submitting comment letters to a public agency and how a public agency ought to respond to comment letters. She provided great examples of effective writing and the art to comment letters. She explained to us that legal writing is about being simple and effective - that less is more. She then gave us an exercise looking at different snippets from comment letters and explaining the strength AND weakness of each of them. Then she explained how to improve each of the comment letters. Finally, she created a larger assignment where we draft our own 1/2-2 page comment letter. It stood out to me because she took us from the beginning to the end and provided us with individualized feedback.<sup>259</sup>

For the most effective professors, practice is embedded in their teaching on a daily basis. On a basic yet insightful level, one respondent shared that “the professors I learn best from provide the tools, demonstrate how to use them, and test your application to new facts.”<sup>260</sup>

#### IV. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study attempted to use survey data to assess whether the qualities, habits of mind, relationships with students, and expectations of extraordinary teachers, determined to be characteristic of the twenty-six law teachers studied in *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, were also characteristic of the law professors that students at a single law school regarded as their most effective teachers.

The current study has some important limitations, namely differences in methodology (surveys rather than interviews and classroom visits), focus on a single institution, absence of any vetting by the investigators of the quality of the teaching discussed by the students, and anonymity of responses. While these limitations counsel hesitation in generalizing from the data and the need for further study, those limitations do not undermine the results detailed in

---

259. *Survey Results*, *supra* note 5, at 2, 8, 12.

260. *Id.* at 20.

Part III of this paper. The purpose of this section is to address the limitations and suggest how readers might, therefore, think about the results. Many of the limitations were not characteristic of the original study.

The first limitation of the instant study was the anonymity of the participants. Participants (survey respondents) in the current study could not and did not identify themselves. As such, there was no opportunity for the investigators to follow up or ask for clarification. Instead, the investigators could only analyze the responses submitted. Moreover, during interviews, as occurred in the initial study, investigators can assess and respond to non-verbal communication, which was impossible for the instant study.

In addition, responders to the survey were neither required nor encouraged to name a particular professor, which limited the investigators' ability to exercise independent judgment as to the quality of instruction in the classes of the professors that the respondents referenced. This factor increased the risk that responders focused on how much they liked the professors or even how "easy" they perceived those professors to be rather than how much or how well the responders learned. This factor also prevented the investigators from assessing responder bias.

Moreover, a large portion of the instant study was based on forced-choice questions for which the investigators provided four alternative answers. Such questions are inherently reductionistic because the investigators determined the subjects of the questions and the possible answers, preventing the responders from generating ideas that are true to them.<sup>261</sup> On the other hand, the use of forced-choice questions allowed the investigators to develop the quantitative data reported in Part III, data that was not available to the authors of *What the Best Law Teachers Do*.<sup>262</sup> In an effort to reduce the impact of this limitation, the investigators added an optional text box below each multiple-choice question and invited survey respondents to supplement their choices with explanations and insights.

Another limitation stems from the fact that the pool of survey participants included only past and present students from McGeorge. Specifically, at the request of the investigators, the law school's Dean of Students sent multiple email solicitations to second, third, and fourth-year students attending McGeorge and 2024 J.D. graduates of McGeorge.<sup>263</sup> At

---

261. See Aida M. Alaka, *The Phenomenology of Error in Legal Writing*, 28 QUINNIPIAC L. REV. 1, 7 (2009).

262. HUNTER SCHWARTZ ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 4-11.

263. The authors specifically excluded 1L students because, at the time the investigators conducted the survey, the 1L students were in their very first semester of law school. The researchers decided to not add more (although optional) work for students given the already high stress environment of the 1L experience. The investigators also excluded McGeorge alumni who

least potentially, there are distinguishing characteristics of McGeorge students that limit the generalizability of the data. For example, McGeorge is more diverse than most law schools with a fall 2024 entering class comprised of 55% students of color and 42% first generation college.<sup>264</sup> The national average of the incoming fall 2024 class was comprised of approximately 41.8% racially and ethnically minoritized groups and approximately 23% first-generation students.<sup>265</sup> In addition, it is possible that California law students are more progressive and activist politically.

A limitation that accompanies this decision not to include experienced alumni practitioners is the inability to examine long-term impacts of extraordinary professors. The investigators acknowledge the possibility that the impact of some law teachers may become more pronounced as graduates move through their practice experiences. For example, a legal writing professor may have been seen as overly critical while a student was in their class, but that perception may change once the graduate sees how well the graduate is prepared to excel in practice.

Furthermore, the survey results may not be representative of the population surveyed. Only sixty-four survey responses were submitted and used for this study.<sup>266</sup> Second-, third- and fourth-year students attending McGeorge and the 2024 J.D. graduates of McGeorge, totaling 488 current and former McGeorge students, were emailed and asked to complete the survey. With only sixty-four responses, the investigators' response rate was only 13.1%. It is worth noting that one sub-group surveyed, the 2024 graduating class, likely depressed the response rate. Nearly 30% (146/488) of the students to whom the survey was sent were members of that 2024 graduating class. As recent graduates in their first jobs, they are much less likely to be regularly checking their McGeorge email accounts and are unlikely to prioritize responding to a survey. The bottom line, however, is that a response rate of at least 16% would have allowed the investigators to assert a 10% margin of error,<sup>267</sup> which the investigators did not get in this instance. Consequently, there is a not insignificant risk that some portion of

---

graduated more than one year ago. The rationale was to ensure that survey participants' experiences were still fresh in mind and not distorted by too many years of practice experience.

264. *Entering Class Profile & Enrollment Information*, UNIV. OF THE PACIFIC, MCGEORGE SCH. OF L., <https://www.pacific.edu/law/entering-class> [<https://perma.cc/8BYX-7YUN>] (last updated Aug. 19, 2024).

265. *First Impression of the Incoming Class of 2024: Largest Class Since 2021, Top-Line Diversity Is Level, More Research Needed and the Work Continues*, LSAC, <https://www.lsac.org/blog/2024-class-first-impressions> (last updated December 16, 2024).

266. *See Survey Results*, *supra* note 5, at 1.

267. *See Survey Statistical Confidence: How Many Is Enough?*, GREAT BROOK, <https://greatbrook.com/survey-statistical-confidence-how-many-is-enough/> (last visited Mar. 22, 2025).

those who participated did so because they had distinctive experiences, good or bad, and are therefore not representative of their peers, whose experiences were such that they did not feel inclined to participate.

Also, the investigators, as noted in the introduction, do not purport to be experts in social science. As a result, there may be flaws in some of the survey questions, and the authors did not run statistical significance tests for the results. The data therefore should be considered exploratory and not conclusive.

In addition, the instant investigators, unlike the authors of *What the Best Law Teachers Do*, only looked at data from students, whereas the authors of *What the Best Law Teachers Do* conducted extensive interviews with each of the twenty-six extraordinary law teachers they featured in the book and sat in on their classes.<sup>268</sup> The interviews generated important data about how the teachers prepared for class, thought about student learning, thought about their work as professors, and assessed learning. The classroom visits allowed the authors to deeply study the day-to-day teaching practices of the subjects of the book. The current study is, therefore, narrower.

Lastly, *What the Best Law Teachers Do* engaged all participants in reflecting upon what exceptional learning meant to them, thus potentially offering the authors the benefit of a richer, more thoughtful set of responses from the participants. Relatedly, being anchored in their own sense of exceptional learning in law school may have allowed the participants to think more deeply about their responses. The absence of such deeper thinking about exceptional learning in law school might have limited the quality of the free response answers.

The identification of these limitations is not intended to undermine the significance of the results reported. Rather, it is an effort to ensure that the data are not overvalued and to spur future research.

## V. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Future studies can address many of the limitations described in the previous section. It would be interesting to ask survey respondents to define for themselves what they believe is exceptional learning in law school and to name their most effective professor. The former would inform their answers to the survey, and the latter would allow future researchers to interview or survey the professors. Instead of surveying an entire law school's worth of students, researchers could solicit volunteers who would be both surveyed and interviewed, allowing for both analysis of survey data and in-depth understanding made possible in interviews. We encourage those who are

---

268. HUNTER SCHWARTZ ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 4-11.

interested in completing supplemental research to consider the limitations detailed in Part IV and keep them in mind in planning their studies.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the current study, the investigators nevertheless believe that efforts to implement the practices, outlooks, habits of mind, and values of the exceptional law teachers described in this article are a worthwhile endeavor. As the authors of *What the Best Law Teachers Do* explained, there are many possibilities for individual professors and faculties to systematically incorporate the survey results into their work.<sup>269</sup> We would be thrilled if our work supported the development of both individual and group teaching practices, inspired experienced, new, and aspiring law teachers, or served as a reference for law school administrations in building the culture of their law school community.<sup>270</sup> One simple way to do so would be to use these results in the design of student course evaluation questions and peer teaching feedback forms.

---

269. *Id.* at 313-23.

270. *Id.*

## VI. APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: SOLICITATION EMAIL

Hello!

This email is being sent to all current McGeorge JD students (excluding the incoming 1L class) and 2024 JD graduates of McGeorge.

A McGeorge professor is conducting a research study to identify and analyze the characteristics and practices of the most impactful law professors. The survey is completely anonymous and voluntary. The McGeorge professor's identity is also anonymous at this time so as to ensure that nobody feels any pressure or obligation to participate.

The survey is expected to take at most one (1) hour to complete and consists of four (4) open ended questions and ten (10) multiple-choice questions. There are neither any risks to you nor direct benefits to you from completing this research survey. While it is not believed there are any risks to you from completing the survey, it is worth keeping in mind that any responses to the open ended questions may be referenced or quoted in the law review article reporting our results, meaning that the detailing of a specific example might possibly lead to a loss of your confidentiality.

If you are interested in completing the survey, please visit this link to access the survey: <https://mcgeorge.wufoo.com/forms/w1ibmk5c0nakfb9/>. Please submit your survey(s) by Friday, November 1, 2024. More than one survey may be submitted per person. In compliance with the University of the Pacific's Institutional Review Board, a copy of the survey introduction and consent notice is attached.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Warmly,

APPENDIX B: SURVEY INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT NOTICE (UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC IRB APPROVAL 8/16/24)

This research survey is completely anonymous and voluntary. We expect the survey will take at most one (1) hour. There are neither any risks to you nor direct benefits to you from completing this research survey.

In this survey, we will be asking you to reflect on the characteristics and practices of the most impactful professor(s) that you have had throughout your law school career and answer questions that will enable us to better understand those characteristics and practices.

We recognize that the multiple-choice answer options may not be all-encompassing and reflective of everyone's experience. If that is the case for you, please indicate which answer option is most accurate, and include any additional or clarifying information that you would like in the optional space provided after each multiple-choice question.

The survey results will be used for research purposes to compile, compare, analyze, and present the characteristics and practices of law professors whom students believe have been the most impactful throughout their law school career. While we do not believe there are any risks to you from completing the survey, it is worth keeping in mind that any responses to the open ended questions may be referenced or quoted in the law review article reporting our results, meaning that the detailing of a specific example might possibly lead to a loss of your confidentiality.

## APPENDIX C: CURRENT STUDY SURVEY QUESTIONS

Open Answer

1. Describe what your most effective professor(s) do(es) to foster your learning.
2. How is/are your most effective professor(s) different from your other professors?
3. What, if anything, has/have your most effective professor(s) done to create an inclusive classroom atmosphere?
4. Which lessons that you learned from your most effective professor(s) have stayed with you? What did your professor(s) do that caused those lessons to stay with you?

Multiple Choice

(each question followed by an optional text box for the participant to expand upon their answer if they desire)

1. Think of your professor who did the best job in encouraging you to do your best work. Which of the following was most significant to you?
  - a. Being kind and supportive.
  - b. Challenging me to respond to difficult questions and tasks.
  - c. Communicating that I am capable of extraordinary work.
  - d. Pushing me by communicating that I could do better.
2. Think of the professor who did the best job of communicating the professor's investment in your success. Which of the following was most significant to you?
  - a. By knowing me as an individual.
  - b. By communicating respect for my experiences in the world.
  - c. By making sure my peers and I are learning.
  - d. By being available and accessible.
3. Think of your professor who had a view of students that you most appreciated. How does that professor view students?
  - a. As students capable of learning.
  - b. As colleagues who have not yet learned everything the professor knows.
  - c. As attorneys already.
  - d. As mentees.

4. Think of your most transformative professor(s). How hard was/were their classes?
  - a. My hardest class in law school (so far).
  - b. Among my harder classes in law school.
  - c. Among my easier classes in law school.
  - d. My easiest in law school.
5. Think of your desire to prepare for class in the class(es) taught by your best professor(s). What was your attitude towards preparing for class?
  - a. I would never be unprepared.
  - b. I did my best to always be prepared.
  - c. I tried to be prepared for most class sessions.
  - d. I did not worry about it.
6. Think of your most effective classroom teacher(s) in law school. What made the professor(s) so effective in the classroom?
  - a. The enthusiasm for the subject of the professor(s).
  - b. The enthusiasm for student learning of the professor(s).
  - c. How organized the professor(s) were.
  - d. How effective the professor(s) were in explaining what the professor(s) were teaching.
7. Think of your most effective classroom teacher(s) in law school. What teaching technique(s) did the professor(s) use?
  - a. Mostly Socratic-style questioning.
  - b. Mostly lecture.
  - c. Socratic-style questioning and lecturing roughly in balanced amounts.
  - d. Many teaching techniques.
8. Think of your most effective professor(s) at handling sensitive or controversial issues. What did the professor(s) do that you thought was the most significant to the professor(s) success?
  - a. Communicate clear expectations for speaking and listening.
  - b. Provide content warnings.
  - c. Respond immediately if a student acted inappropriately or became visibly upset.
  - d. Communicate sensitivity to students' feelings and reactions.
9. Think of your professor(s) who most helped you grow your skills as a future lawyer. Which of the following was most important to your growth?
  - a. Opportunities for practice and feedback.
  - b. Detailed, line-by-line feedback on your work.
  - c. Demonstrations on how to perform skills.
  - d. One-on-one meetings to review your work.

10. How deeply do you feel that this professor knows you as an individual?
- a. Deeply.
  - b. Decently.
  - c. Not at all.
  - d. Either personally or professionally only.