

PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LAW SCHOOLS FOR ITS MAY 29-30, 2008 MONTREAL QUEBEC, CANADA GENERAL ASSEMBLY; ON THE TOPIC" EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING ABOUT OTHER CULTURES AND LEGAL SYSEMS", BY DEAN DAVID A. B. JALLAH OF THE LOUIS ARTHUR GRIMES SCHOOL OF LAW, UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA."

The method of teaching at most law schools is the Socratic method which is as old as the legal profession itself. This method of training challenges the student to be both analytical and to think on his or her feet. In Liberia, Law School Training is predominately undertaken through this method. Students are required to not only read the cases but also to "brief" cases in their note books by summarizing the most relevant facts applied in the determination of the case, identifying the issues that were addressed in reaching the conclusions derived at by the court, identifying and stating the rule of law relied upon and providing the rationale for the decision. One student may be required to brief the case and thereafter there would be a discussion of same. At other times, various students may be asked to provide answers to each of the areas mentioned above. Which ever of the methods for briefing a case that is used, students are then allowed to participate in general discussion of the case which discussion is guided by the Professor.

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At other times in order to accelerate the learning process, a professor may elect to conduct a lecture with very little participation of the students. This method of teaching law is discouraged at our Law School as we believe that in order to fully develop the skills of a future lawyer, he or she must be afforded the maximum opportunity to participate in class discussion and to demonstrate his or her ability to understand complex issues and to work his or her way through the solution to those problems.

Moot Court is one of the ways that our students are exposed to the practical aspect of the law. There is a course at our Law School dedicated to teaching students how to become trial lawyers. This approach to the teaching of law develops the communication skills of all potential lawyers as well as creates in the student the confidence which is required of all trial lawyers.

We have in recent years introduced, in addition to the conventional method of teaching law, the clinical approach with emphasis on practical training through assimilation and Legal Aid Clinics.

In addition to the Moot Court Program there is a Legal Aid Clinic which is operated by the American Bar Association within the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law Complex. This Legal Aid Clinic has as its primary objective the training of Lawyers who would serve as defense counsels with the view to ensure that justice is accessed by indigent persons who otherwise would be unable to be properly represented before the Courts. The emphases at the Clinic is to complement the theoretical knowledge which is imparted through the normal legal education process with practical skills and techniques which are indispensable tools for a trial attorney.

Research and writing is another area that we emphasize at the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law. Students are required to write papers on certain aspects of the Law. These papers, which must meet Law Review Standards, are presented in class and discussed. It is hoped that the best of such papers would be published in the Liberian Law Journal.

Professors also at times assign works to groups of students who are then required to report and in some instances dramatize their work in the form of role playing.

As the Liberian Society operates within two cultural and legal settings, one rooted in the African tradition and the other patterned after the Anglo-Saxon/western approach, this has led to confusion as one crosses from one cultural environment to the other. There are Statutory Laws which govern the urban areas while most of the rural areas are governed by Traditional Customary unwritten Laws and Practices. Attempts have been made in the past, and are continuing to be made, aimed at harmonizing the two systems but the difficulty in accomplishing this objective still remains.

It might be difficult for someone who is not familiar with the African Culture to understand what obtains in a dual legal cultural system by just reading an abridged document but rather would need to participate in a discussion of the intricate and complex issues in order to appreciate it fully.

The International Association of Law Schools through the hosting of this meeting is indeed providing the avenue for such matters to be discussed in-depth thereby affording participants an opportunity to better understanding these rather complex matters.

