

Arsht Research on Ethics and Community Grant

Against a Strongly Differentiated Role-Morality for Lawyers

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Abstract

This program will create the opportunity for first year law students to appreciate points of differentiation between themselves and their classmates, providing an important counterweight to the typically homogenizing effect of the law school experience. It will emphasize that lawyers need not discard their personal identities and ethics and that law students have values that are not always recognized within the traditional law school hierarchy. An important theme of the program is the role that fear, if left unattended, plays in disrupting differentiation and, with it, one's sense of self and alignment with personal values. The program will foster self-reflection, support students who feel different from their classmates and affirm that beyond law school, difference predominates and is valued in a legal profession that stretches from Main Street to Wall Street and beyond. The program also will be attentive to the intense and sometimes traumatic experience and confusion associated with the release of first semester grades, where students' personal identities and ethics are especially vulnerable. We expect this program will help students make wiser choices in law school and as they enter the community.

Practicing attorneys and upper-level law students will facilitate interactive workshops in which they guide first year law students in an appreciation that their clients and the community regard lawyers not only by their technical skills, but also by their moral personalities. Moreover, they will consider how law student success in landing jobs and long-term success and wellbeing in the practice of law may depend on this larger collection of attributes and associated skills. Pragmatic attention will be given to two key law school experiences as vehicles for these larger insights: the Socratic method, and the first semester grades.

All six of us will help develop the program protocol, teacher training materials, and data instruments and later assess the data. The key data generated will be student evaluations of their own ethical orientation assessments. Self-esteem measures also will be administered. This data will generate publishable findings on law student understanding of desired ethical traits and longitudinal shifts that may result after one semester in law school.

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