



Washington and Lee University School of Law

From the Selected Works of Michelle L. Drumbl

December, 2021

Experiential Law: Evolving with the World

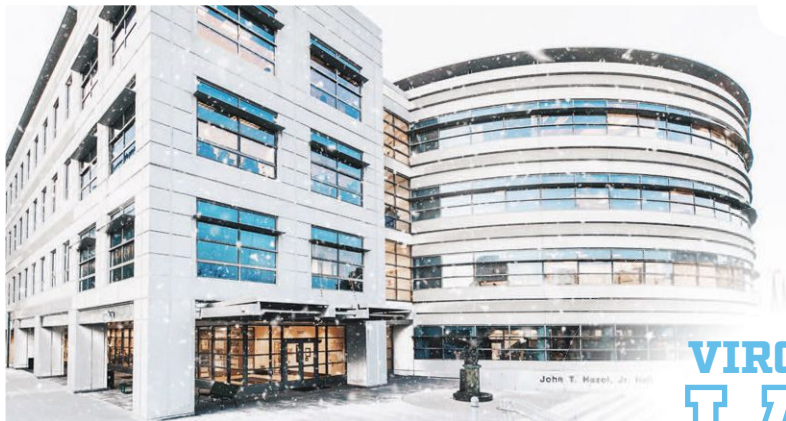
Michelle L. Drumbl, *Washington and Lee University School of Law*

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VIRGINIA LAW SCHOOLS



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About the cover: Virginia's eight law schools in winter are pictured. 1. Liberty University School of Law; 2. Appalachian School of Law; 3. George Mason University Antonin Scalia Law School; 4. Washington and Lee University School of Law; 5. Regent University School of Law; 6. The University of Richmond School of Law; 7. The University of Virginia School of Law; 8. William & Mary Law School. Cover design by Kaylin Bowen.

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www.vsb.org/site/about/bar-staff.



Washington and Lee University School of Law

EST. 1849

The Washington and Lee University School of Law is in the town of Lexington in the Shenandoah Valley. W&L Law was one of the first law schools to introduce small-section legal writing classes and to require a transnational law course in the first year of law school. The law school publishes the *Washington and Lee Law Review*, the *Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice*, and the online *German Law Journal*, which attracts more than two million website visitors interested in international law from over 50 countries each year. The law school also offers the Frances Lewis Law Center to support research into advance law reform, and the Transnational Law Institute to prepare students for the globalization of the legal practice.

Interim Dean **Michelle L. Drumbl** is the Director of the Tax Clinic and Robert O. Bentley Professor of Law at Washington and Lee University. Her teaching and research interests focus on federal income taxation of individuals, tax procedure, and tax policy.

W&L alumnus **Michael W. McLaughlin** is SCS Engineers' senior vice president of environmental services and national specialist on brownfields and landfill redevelopment and electric utilities. He is a licensed engineer and attorney with over 40 years of professional experience providing advice on environmental matters. 🎓

Experiential Law: Evolving with the World

by Michelle L. Drumbi, Interim Dean of The Washington and Lee University School of Law and Robert O. Bently Professor of Law

Like all law schools across the Commonwealth and the nation, we at Washington and Lee Law are happy to be back together to teach and learn in a closer-to-normal environment. The connections formed in Sydney Lewis Hall among students and between students and faculty are at the core of our educational endeavor. Similarly, our students' ability to go beyond Lexington to accumulate in-person lawyering experiences, develop advocacy skills, and solve problems for actual clients, has returned to support a critical component of our mission.

Readers may recall that more than a decade ago, W&L Law overhauled its third-year curriculum to provide an intense array of practice-based experiences for our students in the place of traditional classes. While much has changed from our initial model, experiential education remains a primary feature of a W&L Law education, and there is much to share on that front.

One significant difference from the original program is that the experiential requirements are no longer concentrated into the third year. Rather, students may take classes with a practice-based focus—or even real-client interaction—beginning in their second year. This model has made it easier for our third-year students to add traditional classes to their experiential course load, enabling them to pursue subjects that directly serve their career objectives or have been recommended by a future employer. Our commitment to experiential education remains strong, and all students must complete 18 credits of such courses to graduate. Our credit requirement in this area far exceeds what is ABA required.

Our experiential program is buttressed by our six live-client clinics, in which students get hands-on experience with criminal defense, immigration law, tax law and more. However, there is an important development to share with regard to our capital defense clinic, the Virginia Capital Case Clearinghouse

(VC3). For more than 30 years, our students worked with capital defense attorneys around the state to ensure those charged with murder received the best defense possible in the face of the ultimate penalty. But with capital sentences on the decline and following the abolition of the death penalty in Virginia, the time came for the VC3 to close its doors.

"I never imagined VC3 would have a mission accomplished moment," said David Bruck, the clinic's last director. "I only hope students had experiences in the clinic that broadened their perspective of what it is to be a good lawyer—to be a good lawyer for people who desperately need representation."

It is this same ambition that animates the purpose of our newest clinic, which replaces the VC3 in the curriculum. The Civil Rights and Racial Justice Clinic began operations this fall, under the direction of our newest faculty member, Carla Laroche. With critical race theory as its foundation, students in the new clinic provide direct legal representation in housing and employment matters, develop and conduct know-your-rights workshops, and engage in strategic policy advocacy and reform grounded in the needs of the community. As a way of empowering tenants facing eviction, the clinic has offered legal advice to tenants with landlord-tenant matters in the Roanoke City General District Courthouse weekly since October.

Of course, clinics are only part of the experiential program. In addition to two-week litigation and transactional practice immersions that start the third year, students select from dozens of practice simulations—known as practicum courses—to gain experience in specific legal fields under the tutelage of practicing attorneys and our permanent faculty. Indeed, many of these classes go beyond "simulation" and involve real client interaction and problem solving. Notably, Bob Danforth, an expert in Federal Tax and Trusts and Estates, offers



George Washington University,
J.D. 1999

a class with Roanoke attorney Jennifer Crook where students provide no-cost assistance with wills, advance medical directives, and powers of attorney. Assistance initially was offered to cancer patients and first responders, but this year assistance was made available to the general public. Another class taught by corporate law expert Carliss Chatman, along with attorneys from Vinson & Elkins, engages students with start-up businesses funded through the Walker Program, a community initiative that seeks to increase the number of minority-owned businesses in the region. Students assist with business formation documents, address copyright and trademark issues, and research zoning issues among other matters.

All of this work is preparing students for practice following their graduation. Our graduates continue to enjoy a high rate of employment in law firms, federal and state judicial clerkships, government, public interest, and business throughout Virginia and the nation. 🐼