Why I Teach

Danne L. Johnson
Why do you teach?

We are interested in knowing why you teach. Please tell us your story in 450 words or less. Send your story to the Institute at ilst@lawschool.gonzaga.edu.

**Why I Teach**

*by Danne L. Johnson*

I teach because I am a teacher, a student, and a believer in the textures of life.

I have spent most of my adult life teaching—teaching others about women, race, class, culture, syntax, working hard, perseverance, and overcoming. These life lessons and experiences, which I continue to learn, are among my tools for the classroom. These tools and my experience in legal practice enable me to contextualize legal education for all students.

Before joining the academy, I was an ad hoc teacher. Classes, in the form of talk shows, were held in the car, on the subway, and in the kitchen. My listeners were friends and colleagues, and often strangers passing by my heated discussions. My husband titled the broadcast “Sisters with Views,” and the name has stuck. In addition to my “broadcasts,” I supervised attorneys in the area of securities regulation. I was called upon to teach young attorneys history, writing, organization, public speaking, and ethics, among other topics relevant to the practice of law at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. As a result, I have a practice-based view of teaching and learning.

I insert the discussion of alternative dispute resolution, drafting (including grammar), ethics, current events, and client interviewing into my courses. These are tools which transcend the substantive law, and their use allows for distinctions to be drawn between excellent and mediocre attorneys.

I approach legal education from a holistic point of view, recognizing that legal theory and history are the underpinnings of the doctrines we teach, and that the intersection of these topics with the common use of the law, is the end result of our educational process. Students must be able to see the law from its foundation to its ultimate use.

So what do I get out of it? I get to see the faces of students as they grasp the subtle nuances between doctrine and practice. I learn and grow through each class. I get a warm feeling knowing that my students are prepared to get their cases before a judge and to keep them there, or to use the art of negotiation to avoid litigation. I look forward to the one or two students who come back from a summer experience and proudly report that, “I had to teach them civil procedure” or “I had to explain that this instrument was a security.” These students recognize that learning has taken place.

I teach for fulfillment as a teacher, a student, and a believer in the textures of life.

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