January, 2001

The President's Column

Jane Kent Gionfriddo, Boston College Law School

Available at: http://works.bepress.com/jane_gionfriddo/6/
Joining the Club Without Paying Its Dues: Newcomers View Their First LWI Conference

By Tracy Bach, Assistant Professor of Legal Writing, Vermont Law School

At the opening session of this summer’s Legal Writing Institute Conference at Seattle University, LWI President Jane Kent Gionfriddo asked people attending their first conference to stand and be recognized. I and (what seemed like) a majority of those in the auditorium rose from our seats. Looking into the sea of faces, I began to wonder: all of us newcomers had become LWI members gratis by dint of becoming legal writing teachers, but had we really joined the club? When I left Seattle a few days later, chock full of teaching tips, the latest in LRW research and scholarship, and insights into the organization, I was curious about what others took home from their initial LWI meeting.

Like all good professional gatherings, the Seattle conference provided a forum for putting faces with names. “It was good to see others as enthusiastic about their work as I am about mine,” said Michael Santana, an Assistant Professor of Legal Writing at Vermont Law School. While not quite the meet and greet frenzy of Sundance or even the annual law school orientation picnic, the conference created opportunities to see in person the people whose books you’ve taught from and listserv advice you’ve relied on. Not only does it satisfy your curiosity, it brings you that much more into the fold.

Moreover, the substance of the LWI sessions showed the concern for good teaching and caring collegiality that exemplifies this organization. It was clear from each session that experienced teachers saw the conference as a chance to mentor those just starting out, to help newcomers learn how to teach students positively. Numerous sessions focused on pedagogy, from how to create assignments and critique student work to drawing lessons from different disciplines to enrich our own teaching. Especially popular was a workshop on critiquing student papers, coordinated by Daniel Barnett of Boston College Law School. Judy Giers, who became a legal writing instructor at the University of Oregon last June and attended the conference in July “before teaching a day,” benefitted from the hands-on conference sessions and found the Basics track very useful. While taking a break from critiquing a stack of 54 first-year memos, she happily acknowledged that “I took part of the problem on covenants not to compete [used in the critiquing session] and incorporated it into my curriculum this fall. I already had sample memos to use as a baseline.”

Ben Bratman, Associate Director of Legal Research and Writing at the State University of New York at Buffalo School of Law, also found the session materials and insights remarkably helpful. “I could take these tangible ideas back to the classroom and apply them,” he recently

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4
Below is my testimony. I hope it will help you think about what you will say when your turn comes to speak, whether at your own school or at the national level.

My five LR&W colleagues and I have had the support from our faculty as well as a long line of Deans at Boston College Law School who have had the vision to recognize that excellence in a legal writing faculty provides depth and breadth to the entire law school curriculum.

The Second Draft

We extend our thanks and appreciation to all the contributors, proofreaders and technical assistants who helped with this transitional issue of The Second Draft, especially Mike Horgan, FSU Printing & Mailing Services; Erik Knutsen and Ralaina Ruvalcaba (Florida State); and Donna Williamson and Lisa Thomas (Oregon).