

write on time

BY CHRISTINE STUTZ

On a Saturday afternoon last spring, 38 law students armed with pretend money played a form of legal “Beat the Clock” as preparation for their summer jobs. They were given one hour to complete a sample research assignment, and they had to “pay” for the services they used. It was all part of Successful Summer Strategies, a daylong workshop offered by the law library staff in conjunction with the Office of Career Development.

The seminar serves two purposes, says Susan Herrick, JD, research librarian and coordinator for research instruction. It’s designed to help students who have summer jobs brush up on their legal research skills, while acquainting them with how research methods vary in the practice environment, where time is money and efficiency is paramount. Student participants have endorsed the workshop enthusiastically, which has been offered every spring for four years, Herrick says.

Changes in the legal marketplace have dictated that the School of Law beef up its legal research and writing curriculum. While past generations of lawyers typically learned to write memoranda and conduct research on the job, today, says Herrick, “Lawyers expect that a person coming in will have those skills.”

When employers report back to law schools about their graduates, says Dana Morris, JD, assistant dean for career development, they remark on whether or not students can write, and whether or not



they can perform legal research efficiently. “Many employers don’t have the resources to provide that fundamental training,” says Morris.

“They need summer associates and law clerks who can go to work immediately. Students who have the benefit of legal research and writing curricula have the advantage with the employer,” Dean Morris says, “and Maryland’s students continue to improve.”

Upper-level research and writing classes have been added to the curriculum in the past three years, to give students greater opportunities to hone their skills. Advanced Legal Research and Writing, a three-credit course, added in 1996-97, had four sections last year. “We always have waiting lists for the advanced research classes,” Herrick notes, “because the students realize how important it is.”

The way legal research is conducted is changing rapidly, she notes. With the Internet and numerous electronic search services available, it’s important to stay

current. “It’s changed more in the past 10 years than in the prior 200,” Herrick explains.

Despite widespread access to technology, however, students also need to know the old-fashioned methods of legal research, she says. There are situations when only books are available and electronic searching can be expensive. Educational opportunities such as the summer research skills seminar help the Office of Career Development successfully market law school students to employers. “I’m very confident talking about students who have participated in advanced legal research and writing or the summer research strategies,” says Morris, “because they’re more prepared to practice and more competitive.”

The Writing Center, created three years ago, is a place where students can get one-on-one feedback from a peer with strong writing skills and training in how to coach other writers.

Susan Hankin, the law school’s director of legal writing, says that because most academic courses don’t require students to write, it’s important to offer other opportunity for a variety of legal writing experiences, as well as to provide constructive feedback on student work. “There’s lots of poor writing out there, and unfortunately that’s what students read and start to imitate,” Hankin says.

Hankin, who taught legal writing at Georgetown University Law Center before joining the Maryland faculty in 1996, earned her JD from the University of Virginia in 1986.

Joining Hankin on the Writing Center faculty this fall is Professor Sarah E. Herbert. She has been a Lecturer in Law at the University of Buffalo School of Law since 1994, and helped create that law school’s Legal Research and Writing program. As the Hodgson Russ Fellow for the past two years, she coordinated the program. A 1986 *cum laude* graduate of the Harvard Law School, Herbert received her LLM from Columbia University in 1994. **JD**



Pictured above are the late Walter and Herman Samuelson who graduated from the law school in the 1920s. A generous contribution from the trustees of the Herman & Walter Samuelson Foundation will be recognized in The Writing Center in the new School of Law building.