

# rigorous **WRITING** exercise

*Pursuing writing excellence through a mentor-led project at Nashville School of Law*

## DEVELOPING OUR STUDENTS' RESEARCH & WRITING SKILLS

The Nashville School of Law has developed a unique independent study program designed to hone students' research and writing skills. Under the personal guidance of an experienced judge or lawyer, each student will select an appropriate topic and complete a paper or series of papers on that topic.



The practice of law requires a great amount of original writing. In fact, the average lawyer will write more than most novelists in the course of his or her legal career. Thus, to practice law successfully, today's lawyers must not only be able to speak clearly and persuasively, they must also be able to write clearly and persuasively.

Writing and speaking are separate skills. The ability to write clearly and persuasively is not a skill acquired at birth. It comes with the mastery of basic rules of grammar and punctuation, the ability to be a critical reader, and the development of disciplined analytical skills.

Most lawyers begin to form their professional habits when they are in law school. Accordingly, cultivating students' ability to write clearly and persuasively must be an essential part of a law school's curriculum. Helping students develop a disciplined approach to writing will improve the quality of their legal reasoning, legal interpretation, and legal thought. In short, teaching students to write also teaches them to "think like a lawyer."

The Tennessee Board of Law Examiners, like the American Bar Association's Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, recognizes the central importance of developing and improving writing skills in law school. For law schools subject to the Board's approval, Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 7, § 2.03(f)(2)(C) requires students to complete "at least one rigorous writing experience" before graduation.

A rigorous writing experience involves the closely supervised preparation of a significant research paper or series of related papers of substantial length and sophistication. The supervision includes (1) participation in the selection of the writing assignment or topic, (2) assistance with the formulation of an appropriate research plan, (3) substantial feedback

and critique of the student's research and drafting, and (4) individual sessions to provide assessment and critique of the student's written project.

The Nashville School of Law has developed a unique independent study program designed to hone students' research and writing skills. Under the personal guidance of an experienced judge or lawyer, each student will select an appropriate topic and then complete a paper or series of papers on that topic. The students' work will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and students will receive two credits when their work is accepted by their writing mentor and approved by the school.

Successful completion of this independent study program will be a requirement for graduation of all Nashville School of Law students entering their second year. Students will begin their work during their second year of law school by selecting their writing mentor from a list of mentors maintained by the school and obtaining the mentor's agreement to supervise their work.

The program ends during the student's third year of law school when their mentor approves their completed work and the work is accepted by the school.

Other currently enrolled students may voluntarily elect to participate in this independent study program to the extent that space is available. The schedule and duration of the program for these students will be adjusted based on their expected graduation date.

The Nashville School of Law will recognize the students who produce superior work during their independent study program. This recognition will include acknowledgment at graduation and in *The Torch*, publication of the work on the school's website, and either a monetary award or tuition credit.