

## INSTITUTE FOR LAW SCHOOL TEACHING – IMPROVING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN LAW SCHOOL

By Gerry Hess, Director

How can teachers and students create and maintain a healthy, effective teaching and learning environment in law school? This question is central to the mission of the Institute for Law School Teaching. Information about the Institute's mission and programs is available at <http://law.gonzaga.edu/ilst/ilst.htm>.

Two of the Institute's resources are especially helpful for students and teachers who want to understand and improve the teaching and learning environment: *Teach to the Whole Class: Barriers and Pathways to Learning* and *Principles for Enhancing Legal Education*. Both of these resources contain a 30-minute videotape and written materials to help viewers get the most out of the video. The raw material for both videotapes is 18 hours of interviews with law students at seven law schools.

In *Teach to the Whole Class* students address two basic questions. What hinders your learning in law school? What enhances your learning in law school. Students identify several aspects of legal education that detracts from their learning, including teachers' lack of respect for students, the exclusion of diverse content and perspectives in the law school curriculum, and the difficulty of learning law in the absence of a real-life context. Then, the students offer many examples of teaching methods, diverse perspectives, and respectful behavior that helps them maximize their learning.

In *Principles for Enhancing Legal Education*, students describe the teaching methods and law school experiences that lead to a healthy, effective environment. Those methods and experiences are organized into the following principles for enhancing legal education:

- Promote student-faculty contact
- Articulate clear, high expectations
- Use time effectively
- Respect differences among students
- Foster cooperation
- Provide prompt feedback
- Encourage active learning.

Both of these resources have been used with groups of faculty and students to explore ways to improve legal education. Most students who view these videotapes find that they share the sentiments expressed by the students who speak on camera. Many law schools have purchased one or both of these resources from the Institute.

The student interviews featured in the two videotapes described above also play a role in my recent article, *Heads and Hearts: The Teaching and Learning Environment in Law School*, 52 J. Legal Educ. 75 (2002). I summarize problems with the current environment in legal education and articulate eight components of an optimal classroom environment:

respect, expectations, support, collaboration, inclusion, engagement, delight, and feedback.