

Hybrid Courses:
Combing Legal Research, Writing and Analysis with Torts
John Campbell

Overview

This summer I taught the first ever hybrid course at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law that married legal research, writing and analysis (lawyering process at DU) with a doctrinal course (torts). The course was offered to students who wanted to start law school in the summer in the hopes of graduating in 2.5 years.

Because of my background as a trial and appellate lawyer who focused largely on torts, and because I've taught both lawyering process and torts at Denver Law, this was a natural fit. And I was excited to do it. This hybrid class was the first class students took in law school. It infused the first year curriculum with experiential learning beyond lawyering process. It was also important to me because it helped break down traditional silos – lawyering process teachers don't teach doctrinal courses, and doctrinal courses aren't experiential in the first year.

Logistics

I taught the two courses from 9:30 to 12:30 and 1:30 to 3:30 on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. It was a lot of work. The morning consisted of a 1.5 hour torts class that was, for the most part, like other torts courses. That was followed by a fifteen minute break and then a 1.25 hour lawyering process class that was also much like a traditional LP course. This allowed students to get an introduction to law school that at least simulated some of what they would see in the Fall. The afternoon was purely a lab. Students worked in groups of four on various projects. Sometimes the projects focused only on a lawyering skill, and sometimes they were focused on torts, but that was very

rare. Most afternoons were a chance to marry the substance we covered in torts with the skills we learned in lawyering process.

Blending Torts and Lawyering Process

One example of an afternoon was a day working on rule synthesis in a torts context. We studied proximate cause in torts in the morning. Then we worked through rule synthesis examples in lawyering process. In the afternoon, I asked the students to write the synthesized rule from the proximate cause cases we read. Then they shared them with their group. Then the group shared their revised rules with the class. Seamlessly, we were able to drive home why we synthesize rules (and how), and we also reviewed the content in torts. We spent the last 30 minutes in the afternoon applying our synthesized rule to hypothetical fact patterns. This let me preview application, while continuing to deepen the understanding of the proximate cause rules.

My large writing projects were similar. Each memorandum focused on a specific tort problem. Students learned all the usual things for writing objective memorandum, and as they wrote them, they learned torts concepts that I would not have time to cover in a traditional torts course.

Takeaway

The reviewed were overwhelmingly positive for the course, and the University wants to do it again. But the course is tough to put together, takes a ton of time due to intense grading with quick turnarounds, and requires a great deal of flexibility. There are also institutional hurdles to teaching it, including whether it counts as part of a teaching load, whether you receive additional compensation, etc. I've navigated some of

those hurdles, and I'm happy to discuss how to pitch, and maybe implement, a course like this one at other schools.