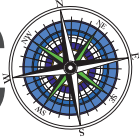


CHANGING COURSE



Teamwork and dedication are keys to navigating a tough spring while staying true to Marquette Law School's purpose.

Suddenly, so much changed.

But when it came to sailing the ship of Marquette Law School forward, some important things did not change. You can list the Law School among the academic institutions that turned the unprecedented and deeply concerning time beginning midway through the Spring 2020 semester into an innovative and generally successful time of keeping education going.

Even as the coronavirus pandemic emptied Eckstein Hall, starting on March 16, it simultaneously filled faculty and student lives with a range of ways to continue their courses as best as possible. For many, the notion of distance learning was new. And the array of tools was also largely new—Microsoft Teams, Zoom, TWEN, Marquette's D2L system, YouTube, and others.

What wasn't new was the willingness to join together, find creative solutions, and push forward. If anything, that willingness was enhanced by the unprecedented circumstances.

And the most important thing that did not change: A commitment to teach and learn, in many cases using the same (albeit adjusted) approaches that Marquette Law School is known for—the Socratic method and simulated experiences, for example.

It was harder to move forward with one of Marquette Law School's other strengths—placements of students in workplaces where they gain valuable legal experience and skills. So much of the legal system came to a halt. But even in this, creative solutions were found.

"We started out in complete uncertainty, and everyone kind of banded together to come up with a plan," said Anna Fodor, assistant dean of students. "Even within the first week of our remote learning environment, we started to see classes pick up steam. Students overwhelmingly got on board."

The changeover to distance learning was not without glitches, from major logistical challenges involving how to accomplish so much in such little time to minor learning-curve problems, such as one professor who accidentally erased 45 minutes of a presentation he was recording. And almost everyone missed the in-class climate, the face-to-face interaction between teachers and students and

among students, and the whole atmosphere of being in the extraordinary space of Eckstein Hall.

But the Law School moved forward. "We didn't have a choice," said Nadelle Grossman, professor of law and associate dean for academic affairs. That may have been the case as a formal matter, but Grossman was impressed with the creative and energetic spirit with which faculty and students embraced the challenge. As the point person for curricular matters, Grossman would know.

In a post on the Law School's faculty blog, Professor Lisa A. Mazzie wrote, "Law School professors have found myriad ways to use [Microsoft] Teams: they've been able to share their PowerPoints; demonstrate online researching in legal databases; create discussion rooms; and post notes, questions, and other files. Some professors record their classes and then post them, others go 'live'; still others combine both methods."

"We've learned how to mute and unmute our mics, use the chat bar, and even create spontaneous polls," Mazzie wrote.

"Naturally, there's always one person who's ahead of the curve," Mazzie wrote. "For us, that person is Professor Chad Oldfather." He told Mazzie he used GarageBand, a website, "to put together 'some really basic (and basically bad) theme music for Con Law classes.'"

Mazzie wrote, "It's not just that we've moved to online teaching and learning. It's also that we've had to adjust our teaching or learning from a new environment: home. On the positive side, teaching and learning from home reduces the commute, minimizes the parking hassles, and shortens the time needed to 'get to class.' As Jazmin Ramirez Bailon, a 2L, said, 'I can wake up five minutes before class and be right on time.'

"But for many, teaching and learning from home is the biggest obstacle of all. Matthew Rademacher, 1L, lamented, 'I've come to learn that working from home isn't the dream come true I had always thought it was. [Before,] I had a system worked out to keep me organized and on track, but that went out the window when we switched to online, so it's been more of a struggle to try to get everything done and learn what I think I'm supposed to be learning.'"

Fodor said some students had spouses and children who also were at home, creating competing needs both for computers and related equipment and for a parent's attention.

Mazzie described how Jay McDivitt, a 2L, found himself "sitting here in my jammies, listening to a recorded lecture about Law and Religion through my headphones, cuddled up with my also pajama-clad 11-year-old daughter, who is identifying polygons on her iPad, and my nearly 8-year-old son, who is reading a book about farts—because he's 7."

Professor Jake Carpenter told Mazzie that his home office has been taken over by his three children, so he set up a temporary office in his basement. He said that to find quiet time in his house when he could record lectures, he needed to work between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m., "when the house is finally quiet."

And Fodor and others also made it a priority to help some students deal with issues such as the stress of the pandemic's impact.

Joshua Hernandez, a 1L from Texas, said his classwork was moving forward, although there were frustrations getting used to the many changes. Taking part in pro bono work is important to Hernandez. He was involved with the Milwaukee Justice Center, a decade-old initiative of Marquette Law School, the Milwaukee County Clerk of Court, and the Milwaukee Bar Association to assist low-income people with civil issues. Hernandez wrote, "It was a somber feeling leaving the Milwaukee Justice Center on Friday, March 13, knowing that I most likely would not be back anytime soon.

"That is why I was so eager to jump at the opportunity to provide any pro bono service possible when Dean Schultz [Angela Schultz, the Law School's assistant dean for public service] reached out on Wednesday, March 18." Hernandez joined in assisting attorneys in providing free answers to people's legal questions online. He subsequently joined a program to provide online help to people involved in divorce proceedings.

Mazzie wrote, "Probably the biggest winners of the move to teaching and learning from home are dogs, cats, guinea pigs, birds, fish, and bearded dragons. Their people. Are. Home. More than one student has lovingly complained about their new study buddies."

"Yet, despite the challenges, a spirit of togetherness infuses our online Law School environment," Mazzie wrote. "Across the board, there are examples of all of us helping each other."

Zach Lowe, a 2L, told Mazzie, "The best thing that I have seen . . . is the interaction between the students and the professors. I am not talking about the material we have been learning, but just the general sense of mutual understanding and unity toward the common goal of successfully completing the rest of the Spring 2020 semester."

Many professors have found ways to connect with their students outside of "class." Professor David Strifling invited his students to a "virtual lunch," where they "informally swapped stories about quarantine and met each other's families and pets." Professor Kali Murray changed her weekly kaffeeklatsch sessions with her Property students to weekly Happy Quarantine Half Hours.

Oldfather told Mazzie, "[I]t's striking to me how quickly the extraordinary becomes the new normal, which in turn becomes just normal. Although I've certainly had to rethink how I approach the material I'm teaching in light of the changed medium by which I'm teaching it, it's already started to seem like 'just what I do.'"

As much as the course of learning moved forward, there was no question that this was not the normal way of doing things. Among the responses to that reality: A temporary grading scale was implemented for the semester in which the traditional A to F scale was replaced. Students were given grades of P for "Pass" as the general grade for receiving academic credit for a course; NP for "No pass" for work that did not receive academic credit (F under the usual scale); and H for "Honors" for those with high performance. None of the grades were to be used in computing overall grade point averages.

Another change of importance ensured that new graduates could continue to be admitted to the Wisconsin bar immediately via the diploma privilege. The Wisconsin Supreme Court approved changes in its practices to waive the traditional day-after-graduation proceedings, in which candidates take the attorney's oath in person at the Supreme Court and then sign the roll of attorneys.

What will be different for the Law School when the stay-at-home regimen is lifted?

Fodor said, "We've learned we can adapt." The Law School showed "the ability to grow, and change, and recognize that we are capable of it."

But both students and faculty realized how valuable in-person life is. "I do think we'll value those human interactions a little more," Fodor said. ■

