

Summer 2019: Tribute to Valparaiso University Law School (1879-2019)

The Future is in Good Hands

Susan Stuart

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/vulr>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Susan Stuart, *The Future is in Good Hands*, 53 Val. U. L. Rev. 897 (2019).

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/vulr/vol53/iss4/11>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Valparaiso University Law School at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Valparaiso University Law Review by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.



THE FUTURE IS IN GOOD HANDS

Susan Stuart*

Legal writing has had a rich and deep history at the Valparaiso University School of Law. Valpo was one of the first law schools in the country to offer legal writing professors tenure-track positions, recognizing early on the importance of written communication in the legal education of all its students. Valpo also recognized the importance of recruiting professors for the long haul so as to invest them with the success of those students as well as the success of the program. Legal writing was as important as the “podium” courses and integral to making Valpo students into good lawyers.

By doing so, Valpo also acknowledged that legal writing is neither an innate nor an internalized skill brought from undergraduate institutions to law school. Indeed, recent trends indicate that elementary, secondary, and undergraduate institutions increasingly place less importance on written communication than in the past. But without proficiency in legal written communication, even a lawyer with brilliant analytical skills has no means to communicate her analysis to clients, the courts, and opposing counsel. Hence, Valpo’s legal writing courses were expected to be rigorous and comprehensive, emphasizing the different writing and reasoning skills that are the backbone of our profession and without which there is simply no lawyering.

Valpo’s legal writing courses taught their students that proficiency in legal writing hones their analysis, forces them to justify their reasoning, and tests their language and organizational choices. Students could not take for granted that their analytical brilliance would sway the reader in the absence of the core attributes of written legal communication. They also could not take for granted that their writing expertise in other contexts would inform the lawyering skills that they needed to enter practice. Valpo’s legal writing program gave them perspective and those skills.

The vast majority of Valpo students responded by doing the work over and over and over until they could transfer those writing skills to other professional circumstances, other practice documents, and other legal problems. And the vast majority of those students were rewarded with professional successes in public service, private practice, or corporate employment where they continue to use those skills.

I say all this a bit selfishly because I taught Legal Writing at Valpo for sixteen years. I wish I could say I had universal success with all my students, but I did not. However, the very nature of the coursework and

* Professor Emerita, Valparaiso University Law School.

the number of student-contact hours inherent in teaching legal writing made me appreciate the quality of students that Valpo admitted. Not only do they continue to share their professional successes with me, I also share in their doggedness in pursuing their dreams, their grace in failure, and their limitless gratitude in my interest. Their battles in my class were hard-fought and their successes fairly won. So it is to them that I give my thanks, and I will be forever grateful they took me along on their journeys.

Thus, I come to my final point: I taught my last legal writing class, in the Fall 2017, to the current Editors of this last volume of the *Valparaiso University Law Review*. These students epitomized and continue to epitomize what it means to be a Valpo student who is willing to undertake all the hard work necessary to learn academic legal writing. They wrote more in seven weeks than they had in a semester's work for other legal writing courses, yet they came back for more. Perhaps more importantly, they have been willing to undertake the overwhelming and thankless task of creating a graceful exit for this publication. And with all they have been through in the meantime, they persisted so as to put together this last paeon to the legal writing program at Valpo. These students will be good lawyers, maybe even great lawyers. Regardless, they have made Valpo proud and will surely continue to do so. To these and all my students, thank you for sharing your journeys with me.