

Innovative. teaching



Teaching has always been the heart and soul of Stetson University College of Law. Throughout the College's history, Stetson professors have pioneered new methods of instruction and integrated practical expertise into legal education.

Technology

One of the major factors that has changed the face of legal teaching has been the introduction of new technologies in the classroom.

Professor Theresa J. Pulley Radwan has integrated Web communications into her courses in business associations, secured transactions and bankruptcy. By using a program created by the West Education Network, Professor Radwan can post assignments,

PowerPoint presentations that accompany her lectures, answers to problems presented in class, and additional resources for students.

"These courses are code-based, statutory, with a lot of specific material," described Professor Radwan. "The Web site reduces paper, makes students better prepared, and offers them more information to use."

Professor Robert Bickel has created Web sites for his courses in Torts, Florida Torts, Employment Discrimination Law, and the History of Civil Rights. The sites combine his course materials with links to related, outside resources. "By building a course page, I can provide some structure and guidance for the students in their examination of the subject beyond the assigned casebook or textbook, and give them full access to the course wherever they are, via their laptop computer and the World Wide Web," he said.

Professor Bickel believes that online course pages are especially good vehicles for providing students with

Professor **Theresa J. Pulley Radwan** is one of the many Stetson professors who are bringing new tools and creative approaches to the classroom.



study guidance, practice case studies and other teaching tools for understanding a legal subject or topic. His course in Florida Torts utilizes online materials produced by Matthew-Bender publishers and LexisNexis that allow students to instantly navigate between treatise materials and reported cases on the various topics in Florida Tort Law, in class with the instructor or on their own.

Professor Bickel explained that producing online course pages is also beneficial to the professor. "The process of building a course page requires careful attention to the relationship between basic course content, current developments, and resources that facilitate research on the subject," said Bickel. "The production of a course page encourages the professor to create study aids for the student." The end result is that the teacher gives more thought to both course content and teaching method.

For Professor Peter Fitzgerald, technology has opened the doors to new interaction between his classes

and others beyond Stetson's borders. Videoconferencing enabled several joint e-commerce seminar classes with George Washington University School of Law, allowing students to communicate in real time using live two-way audio and video over the Internet. The highlight of this interaction was a mock contract negotiation where the Stetson class was advising a Detroit-based "client," who was interested in establishing a Web site that would be designed and hosted by a Canadian company "represented" by the George Washington University class. "I knew it was working when a student turned to the camera and tore up the contract that he was negotiating with the other class. At that point, it was clear the technology disappeared," said Professor Fitzgerald. He has also used other forms of text messaging, audio and video conferencing to connect his students to those at Harvard University and John Marshall Law School.

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Creative legal education

Unusual Approaches

To bring the subject matter of courses to life, some professors introduce unusual approaches into their classes.

For her courses in Latin American Business Law and International Criminal Law, Professor Luz Nagle requires students to examine foreign online legal services to keep up with changing legislation. “Books are good for learning general concepts or the system, but if you are talking about privatization or intellectual property, you need to have access to the legislation,” said Professor Nagle. Students in her Latin American Business Law class are encouraged to review the Web sites of foreign law firms to find English-translated legislative updates.

“They like it; they say it’s more fun,” said Professor Nagle. “Most students have never looked at foreign sources before.” She added that the experience teaches students to look for red flags in foreign law, giving increased consideration to the role of presidential decrees over case law and statutes, as U.S. law traditionally follows.

Teaching pairs of courses in tandem has yielded promising results. This year, second-year students have had the option of taking trial advocacy and evidence in the same semester, using the same cases. “Students in the trial advocacy course seemed to grasp concepts in the evidence course more quickly, because they have had to apply the rules in the courtroom setting,” said Professor Roberta Flowers, who has taught both courses. The idea of teaching related courses simultaneously was so well-received that this summer, one section of Interviewing, Counseling and Negotiation will be taught in conjunction with a section of Professional Responsibility.

For Professor Michael Swygert, innovative teaching does not always involve the way that the classes taught, but the theoretical approaches applied to the course. To help his students understand the idiosyncrasies of

judicial decision making, Professor Swygert integrates theories of jurisprudence, or philosophy of law, and economics into his first-year contracts courses. “When students come to law school, they expect law to be more certain than it is, when in fact, it is not predictable,” said Professor Swygert. “The uncertainty of law and its complexities afford opportunities for creative lawyering.”

Integrating these theories into a first-year course provides a unique intellectual challenge for Professor Swygert’s students; however, many have found that there is a payoff in the end. “A lot of my students tend to appreciate the wider perspectives more after they have been out practicing a while. They realize later that it gives them opportunities, as practicing lawyers, to research a problem, and though the case may not be in their favor, they may be able to craft an argument, to be creative, and recognize that the law is a very fluid process,” said Professor Swygert.

Professor Jack Graves also encourages his students to consider judicial decision making, but in an entirely different way. In his first-semester Contracts course, Professor Graves argues both sides of an appellate case, with student volunteers serving as the panel of judges. In the second-semester course, the professor and students swap roles.

“This exercise helps first-year students understand how a judge chooses from each party’s arguments, and how common law evolves from the clash of ideas,” said Professor Graves, who added that volunteers for these role-playing assignments are not hard to find. “By the second semester, students know that there is a payoff... that class participation is the best way to learn.”

Learning through student peers

Knowledge does not always transmit directly from professor to student. Often, students can benefit from sharing in class projects with each other.

Professor Michael Allen creates enthusiasm for his first-year Civil Procedure courses by asking the class to break into small groups of “law firms” and challenging them with practical problems related to the course topics. The student law firms are then asked to write a response letter to him as a client.

“It shows that even old, highly theoretical material still has practical application, and it gives them the opportunity to be amazingly creative,” said Professor Allen, adding that some groups would even create their own logos and letterhead for the assignment. “In the first few weeks of law school, students become inundated with technical work, which can initially sap their excitement for the law.”

Professor Allen believes that his approach reflects the teamwork expected in private practice and yields many benefits for his classes. “It gives me the ability to get to know students better, it is interesting and fun, and it gives me a sense of who is not getting the concepts early on. In a class of 65, you can’t do that, but in a group of six, you can.”

Peer academic support is frequently helpful for students after class. The Dean’s Fellows and Legal Writing Clinic programs at Stetson were designed so that high-achieving upperclass students can provide guidance and study skills training for those enrolled in required courses. “Students should go to the professor if they have a substantive question, but for skills-based questions, it helps to get feedback from someone else,” said Professor Carolyn Nygren, who leads the training program for the Dean’s Fellows.

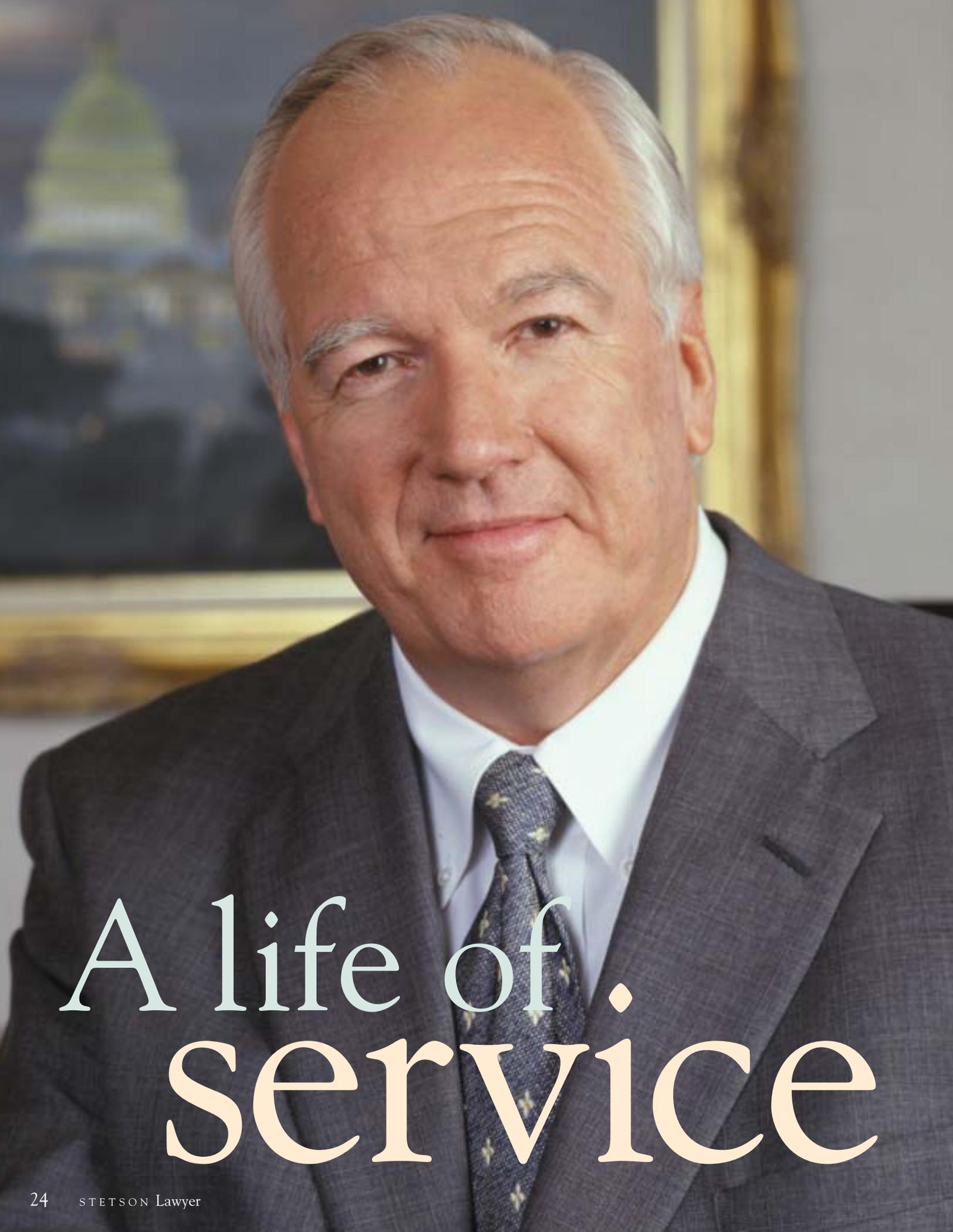
“Dean’s Fellows focus on general acclimation to law school by a peer, specific acclimation to the professors they have, and general study skills information like taking notes on cases and writing outlines,” said Professor Nygren.

Stetson’s writing clinic, staffed by trained Teaching Fellows, has become an unofficial model for other law schools through its success in using students as advisors. “The Teaching Fellows serve as sounding boards on organization, grammar and writing styles,” said Dean Darby Dickerson, who directs the clinic.

The teaching styles and methods of Stetson law professors are diverse and unique. Yet through these differences lies one constant guiding principle: to prepare students to become the best lawyers possible.

Professor Luz Nagle encourages her international law students to think globally by using online resources from other countries.





A life of
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