



Law: Looking at the first year curriculum through a different lens

A course entitled "A Feminist Revisit to the First-Year Curriculum" by Dr. Anita Bernstein, Chicago-Kent College of Law (1996)

Course Design:

The seminar is divided into two parts. The first part of the course re-examines the first-year curriculum and addresses doctrinal topics, regarded as "women's issues", that students have not yet encountered in class. Such legal problems fall within the limits of Civil Procedure, Contracts, Criminal Law, Property, and Torts. Topics include intramarital crime, contracts such as prenuptial agreements, gender issues arising from the dissolution of marital assets, juror rejection based on gender, and the statutes of limitations on the redress for childhood sexual abuse. The course gives equal weight to feminism and to the content of the first-year curriculum; it is both a tribute to and a critique of that curriculum.

The second part of the course is devoted to re-examining case law in light of differences in the treatment of women and men, and to studying and critiquing feminist legal scholars. In addition to a series of readings, Dr. Bernstein assigns reaction papers and a research paper. The research thesis must relate to women and the law and should address an area within the first-year curriculum. Throughout the course, the breadth of the first-year curriculum serves to broaden the scope of the seminar as well as to unite the different subjects covered in the seminar into a coherent whole. The feminist aspect of the course not only offers new insights into the American legal system, but also encourages students to critically reflect upon the required curriculum in the first year of law school and the broader dimensions to the career they have chosen.

Higher Level Learning:

Through the feminist revisit of the first-year curriculum, students gain a better understanding of the broad spectrum of problems embedded within core legal subjects (**Thinking**). The course reinforces the importance of critical analysis in both legal practices and legal scholarship (**Thinking**). Students have the opportunity to re-evaluate their concepts of American law, legal education, legal practice, feminism, and the impact of law on society, ultimately enabling them to integrate new perspectives

with first-year knowledge (**Connecting**). They also reflect on their own professional education in light of their new perception of the law school's curriculum (**Learning**).

Active Learning:

Dr. Bernstein models advanced critical analysis skills (**Observing**), and students refine these skills by reading and analyzing case law as well as the writings of legal scholars (**Doing**). Students interact extensively with each other in class discussions (**Dialogue with Others**), yet the course also places great emphasis on reflection and re-assessment of personal views (**Dialogue with Self**).

Bernstein, A. (1996). A Feminist Revisit to the First-Year Curriculum. Journal of Legal Education, 4 1 (pp.217-232)