

Counseling the “Challenging” Student

Wednesday, April 1, 2009 – 11:30am to 12:30pm

It is easy to work with a student who knows what she wants to do, has outstanding credentials, and has her documents in order. Unfortunately, working with many students provides more of a challenge. How do you best counsel the student who doesn't know what she wants to do or why she came to law school? How about a student so lacking in social skills that he can't get past an interview? Or the student with some type of major blemish on her record? In this session, we will address a variety of challenging situations and will share tools, ideas, and resources for working with these - and other – student challenges.

1. Types of “Challenging” Students
 - a. With stellar / cellar grades
 - b. Clinically Diagnosed With “X Y or Z”
 - c. Clueless and Could Careless
 - d. Clueless and Wants to Care
 - e. Criminal Record
 - f. Egocentric / Narcissistic
 - g. Emotionally Stunted
 - h. Financially Ignorant
 - i. Helicopter Parented
 - j. Obstinate
 - k. Scared to Death Wallflower
 - l. Socially Inept
 - m. Substance Influenced
2. Tools & Resources
 - a. Coaching, Counseling & Working with Students
 - b. General principles to keep in mind regardless of the situation:
 - i. Skip the popularity contest: it's your job to help them, not to be their friend
 - ii. The credit for success or failure should be theirs, not yours: students need to take responsibility for their situation, if you do the work for them, you are teaching/reinforcing learned helplessness
 - iii. Patience and repetition must be one of your virtues and manifested naturally: “it may be the 100th time you have answered the question, but it's the first time for them”
 - iv. You can say almost anything with the right choice of words and tone of voice
 1. This takes more practice than you would think
 2. Use non-accusatory/non-personal language and make it fact-based, rather than value-based
 - a. i.e. “You have low/bad grades” vs. “XYZ Employers tend to be grade conscious”
 - v. Set rules and boundaries
 1. i.e. “Won't work directly with parents because of FERPA”
 - vi. If it's not your area of expertise, refer them out
 1. i.e. is it a Dean of Students issue?
 2. Bar Exam?
 - c. Videotaping a practice interview

- i. Ask THEM what they see
 - 1. You will be surprised how many of them can pick up on their own problems when they see them on camera
- d. They won't listen to you but they might listen to someone else:
 - i. Alumni counseling
 - 1. Your best friends may be a relatively new graduate
 - ii. Guest speakers
 - iii. Upper classmates
 - iv. Faculty/Deans
 - v. Professional Publications
- e. Use a variety of formats to deliver your message:
 - i. Some are auditory learners, some visual, etc.
 - 1. Written materials, individual counseling, large group meetings, small group meetings, student bar association, email, audio or video recordings, etc.
- f. Resources
 - i. NALP: listserve, colleagues, publications, Web site, data/research
 - ii. ABA: www.abajournal.com/blawgs/careers
 - iii. Lexis/Nexis, Westlaw
 - iv. NACE: <http://naceweb.org/> – undergraduate career development organization with excellent resources

PROFILE FOR SIMULATION

Ivana Jobnomaatawhut is a fulltime, third-semester second-year law student who cannot seem to get traction with respect to making decisions regarding her career. She has performed fairly well ending up in the top 20% of her class, but did not pursue any spring (1L year) or fall (2L year) recruitment programs and has not attended any of the voluntary career and professional development programs offered. She also did not follow through on the invitation she received to write on to the Law Review. Her close friend has noticed that she seems to be floundering and has convinced her to seek out some guidance from the Professional and Career Development Center. This simulation is designed to show different ways to approach this student vis-à-vis working with versus working for the student and the distinctions between counseling and coaching.

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