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Why I Teach

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Why do you teach?

We are interested in knowing why you teach. Please tell us your story in 450 words or less. Send your story to the Institute at ilst@lawschool.gonzaga.edu.

Why I Teach

by Kathleen Elliot Vinson

I teach because of my love of learning. When learning is talked about in the context of academia, most people think of students learning from a teacher. While it is exciting for a teacher to see the light bulb go on for a student, other great teaching moments occur when a teacher reflects on what she has learned from the other side of the podium, from student to teacher. Teaching is not a one-way linear approach, but rather recursive and reflective for both student and teacher.

This year I completed a decade of teaching; but whether I have taught for ten years, ten months, or ten days, I am just as eager to learn from my students as I am to impart my knowledge to them. While it is important to be knowledgeable and experienced in one's field, when teachers feel they already know everything about their course and its pedagogy, or that they could not gain any knowledge from their students, teaching and learning ends on the part of both the teacher and the students. My best teaching occurs when I am confident in my abilities, yet open to learning from my students.

Teaching is challenging, exciting, inspiring, and rewarding. It provides a great opportunity for the teacher to learn. Teaching is challenging when I need to use creative, different ways to introduce information to the class because students have different learning styles and bring different perspectives, assumptions, values, and skills to the classroom. Teaching is exciting when I realize that students have understood a difficult concept, which could help establish the foundation for their future learning and success. Teaching is inspiring when I learn the challenges some students have had to face and what they have overcome through persistence and perseverance. Finally, teaching is rewarding when I talk to the students instead of talking at them and listen patiently to them, which can have a lasting effect on their educational experience and their life.

In the end, I hope the knowledge that I have shared with my students is as great as the knowledge that I have gained from them.

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