Improving Student Learning in the Doctrinal Law School Classroom: Skills and Assessment.

By Kimberly E. O'Leary, Jeanette Buttrey, & Joni Larson. (2020), 138 pages, ISBN: 9781531019358. $20.50

Subject: How to be a better teacher

Useful for: Useful for doctrinal and skills-based law professors alike, and those seeking to incorporate and/or improve skills-based assessments in their courses.

Format: Chapters with index, with professor prompts, assessment suggestions, exercises, and workbook activities throughout.

Reviewer's Comments:
Improving Student Learning in the Doctrinal Law School Classroom argues that skill-building and doctrine should be taught together. It is short, easy to read, and offers several ideas for how to improve student learning in doctrinal courses. While emphasizing active learning techniques and frequent, varied forms of assessment, it provides several suggestions for how to assess student learning, such as by way of discussion threads, group activities, applied-learning assignments, and more. Additionally, it includes several practical materials and resources, including professor prompts, assessment suggestions, exercises, and workbook activities.

Chapter 1 examines multiple learning theories, including backward design, scaffolding, knowledge and skill transfer, and Bloom's taxonomy. Chapter 2 explains that long-term learning occurs when students can recognize what they do and do not understand and emphasizes the need for and use of frequent assessments to help students develop such recognition while simultaneously meeting ABA Standards. Chapter 3 looks at various ways that students learn and is the first of several chapters containing a supplementary workbook to assist professors in their application of chapter suggestions. Chapter 4 discusses how to help students to fully understand client problems, goals, and experiences in order to build effective legal arguments.

While Chapter 5 discusses how professors can help students learn to view the topic they are covering in a larger perspective, Chapter 6 notes it is essential that students understand a variety of tools for building mental structures and are able to call upon the proper tools when analyzing a legal problem. Specifically, it looks at elements,

standards and tests, factors, sequencing, flexible thinking, and normative values; and discusses how professors should require and assess student implementation of such tools. Chapter 7 looks at the multiple steps involved in formulating legal advice and provides suggestions for how to help students understand that multi-layered client goals and outside factors drive the arguments and strategies lawyers pursue. Chapter 8 emphasizes the need for students to be able to practice and not simply memorize the law, and highlights the role that creativity can play in legal education. Chapter 9 discusses various learning disabilities and proposes possible solutions to remedy them.

Improving Student Learning in the Doctrinal Law School Classroom highlights the need for the incorporation of skills training in doctrinal education, and it will be helpful to doctrinal and skills-based professors alike, as well as those seeking to incorporate and/or improve upon existing skills-based assessments in their courses.

Reviewed by: Ashley Arrington, University of Houston Law Center, in 2021.