

Wednesday Webinar, 12/2/20

Topic: A Conversation on Balance & Wellness in the Associate Dean Role

What follows are notes summarizing the discussion.

Special thanks to Jill Engle & David Jaffe for leading our discussion.

- 1) Identify the sources of your lack of wellbeing/recognize the stressors you are feeling. May include fear of loss of job, student stress, distance from colleagues and students, worry about whether colleagues are doing well, worry about whether colleagues we supervise are actually doing the work from afar when working at home, stress caused by the pandemic and fear of getting ill or having others get ill, doing “enough.” Once you recognize these stressors, consider what is the worst case scenario and how you would handle the worst case scenario. Talk or think through it. What are processes you could follow to handle and perhaps avoid the awful outcomes you might fear?
- 2) Consider whether the things that are troubling you the most are real or are you “catastrophizing.” Gain some perspective on these things.
- 3) Maintain physical and mental health and good habits. Recognize that you deserve those things.
- 4) Consider getting a “study buddy”—someone with whom you can commiserate about issues you are facing. Could be an AD from another law school or a colleague at your school. Should be someone who is going through similar things with whom you can chat on a regular basis.
- 5) It is okay to be disappointed or even depressed for a little while. Then, reach out for assistance from a professional or a peer so that you keep moving on—through the day and through the tasks you face.
- 6) Avoid taking on students’ and others’ concerns and problems personally. You need to compartmentalize so that you don’t get swamped or absorb the challenges and negative energy brought to you by students and colleagues.
- 7) Some students blame us for what they are going through and for the pandemic. We need to be forgiving of them, but not accept the responsibility they are trying to give us for what is going on in the world.
- 8) Many people are trauma victims right now and/or they are acting in ways frequently seen in trauma victims. They do not realize this. None of us is doing as well as we think we are. That is okay. If we recognize this phenomenon, we may be better able to assist or at least understand behavior that is not normal from our students, our colleagues, and ourselves.
- 9) Disasters reveal to us that we are not in control; they make us feel helpless. A good antidote to this feeling of lack of control and helplessness can be to help someone else. It can make you feel better and feel more in control.
- 10) ADs are faced with trying to figure out how far we should go to assist our students. Boundaries seem to be blurred from ordinary times. Students are reaching out for and relying on us for more and more things outside of what law schools “usually” provide. We had government funds through the CARES Act; those may be gone. We may have had institutional funds; those may or may not be available. How far do we go? How far should we go? School cultures vary on this. Some ADs have provided rides for students to medical facilities, brought students food and other resources. Other ADs have been a little more hands off. Tough to sustain reaching

into your own pocket to financially assist students; some cautioned against crossing that line. Some schools have alums who have provided support for emergency funds for students.

- 11) With 1L students, it is tough to distinguish between what may be “ordinary” 1L stress versus what is extraordinary stress layered on due to the pandemic. These 1L students do not know any other law school experience.
- 12) Some schools will survey students after this semester to ask students these 3 things: How are you doing? How are we doing? What could we do to make this a better experience for you? The gesture of inquiring can be meaningful to students. Some participants thought this type of survey could lead to disappointment because students may expect more than what a school deems is appropriate.
- 13) It is challenging to draw the line and stop or reduce assistance because many students are very needy.
- 14) ADs are finding the need to provide accommodations to students one on one for varied circumstances, from students’ own illnesses to illnesses and deaths of students’ family members. Students experience these things differently. ADs are trying to assist and level the playing field without creating undue advantages for some students over others.
- 15) Taking attendance has always been a good way to keep track of students and perhaps identify those students who are struggling outside of the classroom. This semester things are a bit different, and profs and ADs have tried to adapt and strike a balance between rigor and fairness because of issues beyond student control.
- 16) ADs expressed concern over benchmarks for what it means to be good at our jobs in pandemic times, saying this is tough to measure because so many things have shifted and continue to change.
- 17) Self compassion is necessary. Self care is necessary. Suggestion was to have certain wellness activities (wellness snacks) that you do every day, even if just for a short time. Could be taking time to list 5 things for which one is grateful, could be taking the time for physical activity (walk, run), could be meditation, either on your own or using an app like the CALM app or Headspace app. Could be “working walk” if busy. A Mindfulness and Law Society exists at some law schools.
- 18) Maintaining boundaries is important, especially because many are working at home. Maintain a HARD STOP so that you actually “leave” work for some time during the day. Lines are blurred between home and work so need to do this one consciously and deliberately.
- 19) At least one school assisted students in finding classmates who are in their same geographical areas so that the students could meet/connect and have a colleague or more in their same town or neighborhood. Students appreciated this immensely. It assisted with student connections.
- 20) One speaker reminded us of the airline advice to put on your own oxygen mask first before assisting others. This holds true in the law school environment, which is why self care and wellness is so important for those who work with students.
- 21) Look for silver linings. Some people are thriving working from home. Recognize good habits you have developed and benefits you are enjoying from working from home and continue those even when you return to a more normal routine. Give yourself permission to embrace the silver linings in your life, even as you handle others’ crises or tough situations. Enjoy the flexibility.
- 22) Good enough is good enough right now.

23) Be compassionate and recognize your limits. Try to avoid making promises you are unable to keep.