

C. Town Hall Meetings/Public Education

Professionalism commissions might also use the format of town hall meetings to bring together lawyers, judges, law professors and deans, and members of the public to discuss matters of professionalism. Most notably, Georgia conducted two successful series of town hall meetings, which each drew about 1000 participants. The first, conducted during the period from 1992 to 1994, was titled, “Attorney Concerns about Ethics and Professionalism.” Conducted in twelve communities, the meetings brought together members of the legal profession to develop a shared vision of the profession of law. The discussions contributed to the later work of the Commission in a variety of ways. In particular, two new programs - the Law School Orientations on Professionalism and the Law Practice Management Program - were developed in response to the concerns of lawyers at the meetings. In 1993, the Town Hall Meetings received the ABA's E. Smythe Gambrell Professionalism Award.

The second set of Georgia town hall meetings, conducted from 1994 to 1996, was titled, “Professionalism in Client Relations.” Members of the community and clients were invited to participate to better explore client concerns about representation, client relationships with lawyers, public access to the justice system, public perceptions of the justice system, and effective communication between clients and lawyers. In response to the concerns articulated at these meetings, in 1995 the State Bar of Georgia established the Consumer Assistance Program to resolve non-disciplinary complaints through conciliation, negotiation, and education. Also in response to these town hall meetings, in 1996 the State Bar established a Committee on the Standards of the Profession to investigate the bar's responsibility to train new lawyers in competent and professional client representation. As a result, Georgia adopted the first mandatory mentoring program for new lawyers, the Transition Into Law Practice Program (TILPP).

The Texas Center engages in public education in the form of presentations to civic groups, clubs, schools, and other lay groups. In particular, the Center presents its “Noble Lawyer” series of programs, which broadly discuss professionalism through the paradigm of the many lawyers, past and present, who epitomize the highest standards of integrity. This historical paradigm is used to examine various issues, including the meaning and application of various disciplinary rules, the ethics of responding to attacks on the legal profession, and upholding the stature of the profession, the judiciary, and the rule of law. Substantial historical and sociological information and public opinion research are brought to bear on these subjects. The goal is to outline a cohesive and integrated approach to respect for the rule of law and the American democratic tradition by reference to the morality and the persona of the noble lawyer throughout history.

This is pursuant to the part of the Center’s mission that seeks to “focus the attention of... the public on excellence in the profession and the adherence by the profession to high ethical standards.” The Center is always creating and updating programming about legal ethics and professionalism suitable for audiences beyond traditional CLE audiences, e.g., civic clubs, community organizations, etc. These programs spread a simple and repeatable message about: a) the integrity and professionalism of the vast majority of lawyers; b) the real reasons why lawyers are often derided and attacked and their relationship to disrespect for judges and the rule of law in general, c) how lawyers can

and should lead a constructive response to those attacks, and d) why the broader society should care.