Creating “Whole Lawyers”:
Wellness, Balance, and Performance Excellence
At Northwestern University School of Law
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The Need for “Whole Lawyer Development” in Legal Education

Lawyers are one of the most respected groups of professionals in our society. A career in the law holds the potential to be most prestigious, meaningful, and rewarding. The legal profession is integral to society in that lawyers bear great responsibility to the public, as a whole as well as to their individual clients within that whole. Concurrent with the prestige, honor, and reward that comes with being a lawyer, data shows that it is one of the most unhealthy and unhappy professions. The demanding nature of the work coupled with exacerbating factors (e.g., rising debt load) makes lawyers susceptible to an unhealthy, unhappy career. In fact, lawyers have some of the highest prevalence rates of mental health issues including depression, substance abuse and dependence, relationship conflict, and anxiety. (Krieger, 2002) The recently documented rate of unhealthy lawyers in the profession today poses great risk not only for the personal well-being of lawyers but also for the public at large in terms of lawyers’ fitness for duty.

Many contributing habits, beliefs, coping styles, and profession-specific cultural norms that lead to the high rate of unhappiness among lawyers begin in law school. Though law students start law school with rates of clinical anxiety and depression similar to the national average, a dramatic increase occurs during the first year. Thus, unhappiness and lower health rates among lawyers is an issue for legal education as much as it is one for the profession at large. Legal education institutions must commit to develop the “whole lawyer,” one who is equipped with not only the necessary intellectual and technical skills but also the resiliency, emotional and social intelligence, and professionalism to cope with the demands of a career in law, in order to prevent the mental health problems seen in the profession today and protect clients. The following programs are part of the “Northwestern Law difference,” our way of graduating lawyer leaders who are poised, balanced, and confidently ready for sustainable, effective legal practice, as well as personal achievement, success, and fulfillment.

What is “Whole Lawyer Development”? 

Northwestern University School of Law provides exemplary education in the intellectual and technical skills to be a lawyer. All law schools strive to offer this education. What separates Northwestern Law is a dedication to develop sustainable, balanced, and healthy lawyers who have the resiliency skills to flourish in this demanding profession. Through educational and support programs Northwestern Law develops leaders who value self-care, know how their story translates into the practice of law, who have the self-awareness to find joy in their career, and are thinking about their identity as a lawyer and in the profession. Northwestern Law understands that being a lawyer is a path to great productivity, practice, and problem solving, and that we must take care of the instrument first to achieve greatness in the legal profession.
I. Wellness Plan

The Northwestern University School of Law Student Services, Student Bar Association, Illinois Lawyers Assistance Program (ILAP), and Northwestern University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) collaborate to organize and implement programs throughout the year dedicated to informing, supporting, and leading law students to a healthier and happier approach to legal studies and their place in the legal profession.

1. Wellness Week

A week of programs and events, either in late fall prior to reading week or early in the spring semester. The menu of programs for the week includes:

1. Dance class
2. Yoga class
3. Recreation center tabling in Atrium
4. CAPS and ILAP tabling in Atrium
5. Nutritional education through healthy snacks tabling
6. Sleep hygiene education
7. Chair massages
8. Financial Health programming
9. Panel presentations (featuring students, faculty, and/or alumni) debunking myths and realities of grades, OCI, and exams
10. Student panel on healthy coping
11. Teaching sustainable coping practices (by Law school Psychologist, students, faculty, administrators, members of CAPS and ILAP)
12. Wellness and Performance enhancement workshop (from training catalogue).

2. Training Catalogue

At Northwestern Law we believe that student success in their legal career is largely based on having the ability to stay healthy and happy. When the individual is flourishing so too will his or her career. The program to meet the needs of each class or group will vary. Below is a menu of wellness and performance training possibilities.
MINDFUL/CONTEMPLATIVE LAWYER OFFERINGS

Introduction to Mindfulness
Mindfulness meditation is an empirically supported practice that can decrease stress, boost concentration, and aid in emotion regulation through the cultivation of present-moment awareness. In this workshop, students learn one simple mindfulness skill designed to improve concentration and decrease reactivity to distressing thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. Additional mindfulness skills can be added by attending mindfulness drop-in sessions or through mindfulness training provided in courses (ADR, Lawyering Success, etc.).

Mindfulness Drop-In Stations
This space is provided for students to meet and share mindfulness insights and experiential practices. Students can explore additional ways in which mindfulness meditation reduces stress, assists in legal practice, and enhances overall well-being. The majority of time is spent meditating or practicing a relaxation technique such as breath meditation.

Biofeedback
In Biofeedback sessions, electronic devices monitor and amplify nervous system activity, which directly reflects the degree to which an individual is feeling calm or stressed. Being able to "see" certain aspects of our nervous system functioning in real time allows the individual to control physical, emotional, and mental activity for the betterment of their health. In this training participants get to use a Stress Eraser, which is a measure of Heart Rate Variability (HRV), and watch as we focus on the breath and slow our mind’s chatter to resolve. Biofeedback sessions are particularly helpful for individuals who need a visual result or are logically oriented (law students) such that they need to see results.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
Most personal development training sessions can be done with any size group and range 1-2 hours (with 1.5 hours being ideal).

Emotional Intelligence (EI): What It Is and Why It Matters for Lawyers
In today’s competitive job market employers seek individuals who not only possess the threshold intellectual and technical capabilities but also a high degree of what is known as emotional intelligence (EI). EI is the ability to recognize and effectively manage emotions in ourselves and in our relationships with others. In this didactic-experiential workshop students start to develop the “people skills” needed to navigate key inter- and intra-personal
dynamics at the core of all professional work. This session will explore EI in greater depth for students who are interested in a higher degree of self-reflection and actualization.

**Finding Joy in Your Legal Career: Using Positive Psychology to Develop a Sustainable, Meaningful Legal Practice**

Well-being and career satisfaction greatly impact performance. Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning and what makes life worth living. This workshop presents empirical research in positive psychology and the key lessons about building and sustaining joy in our career.

**Finding Yourself in the Law**

In this session teaches students gain insight into how to find themselves in the practice of law. Using reflective questions students are asked to contemplate how key experiences shape their legal practice and how they can tell their story to leverage their strengths in their career. The training focuses on enhancing self-awareness to capitalize on individual strengths.

**MBTI, Legal Education, and Law Practice**

In this session students recognize their personal strengths and weaknesses, then learn how those interplay with legal education. Students learn about in-class and study techniques that complement and contrast their strengths, and how to manage both. Students also learn about personality strengths and law practice, such that they can devote time and effort during their legal education to improving their strengths and addressing their weaknesses.

Other sessions in development:

**Goal Setting for Peak Performance**

One challenged for many students is setting goals and charting a reasonable and manageable path to that end. This session will teach the key components to task and performance management.

**Leadership and Collaborative Law**

This session will build on prior sessions on personal strengths and relationship building to allow students to better work in collaborative work environments.
STRESS MANAGEMENT

Resilient Lawyer
Law students and lawyers routinely face failure and setbacks. Resilient lawyers bounce back from obstacles with greater confidence and awareness. In this workshop students learn keys to responding well to adversity. This session also helps students who are experiencing stress, in one or more of the following manifestations:

- Procrastination
- Anxiety, including test anxiety
- Distress arising in connection to personal or academic stressors

Students learn how to:

- Identify physical and emotional symptoms associated with stress
- Uncover the types of situations that create stress
- Manage stress inducing situations
- Manage difficult conversations and relationships

Understanding and Avoiding Burnout
Burnout is defined as a psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished sense of personal accomplishment that occurs among professionals who work with other people in challenging situations. (Maslach, 1982) Students learn the hallmark symptoms of burnout and evaluate their own burnout level through the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). People who experience burnout are not as productive as their peers and often lack engagement in the work. Students will discuss and learn how to utilize adaptive coping skills such as valuing self-care, finding balance, time management, setting boundaries, and stress reduction techniques.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Capitalizing on Appreciative Inquiry
In this interactive workshop, participants are introduced to the Appreciative Inquiry approach, currently trending in leadership development. Through use of appreciative questioning techniques students learn how the appreciative inquiry approach increases the effectiveness of goal setting, team building, team meetings, decision-making processes, and improved client relationships.
Understanding the Science of Love: A Training on Developing Meaningful Connections

Sharing empirical evidence from Social Psychology on love, students learn basic theory about intimate relationships and how to improve meaningful emotional connections with others in their life. Relationships are at the core of wellbeing. In this session, students learn the science of psychology about developing positive relationships at home and work.

Other sessions in development:

Getting Your Needs Met through Productive Communication

Communication skills are key to lawyers and professionals, and are often the source of critique and error. This session will explore how to ensure effective communication and avoid communication breakdowns.

Mastering Work/Life Balance

The most productive lawyers have figured out how to balance their work and their life outside of work. This is key to professional and personal success. Recent research has explored and validated the need for this balance. This session will introduce students to the research and explore how one can achieve balance while working in a hierarchical profession.

In-class consultations (as desired/needed/scheduled)

Certain curricular pieces lend themselves to an integrative approach with many of the skills taught above, particularly mental health and healthy coping. Faculty members often request an in-class workshop. Such courses include Negotiation, Advanced Negotiation, and Clinic. In addition, many degree programs request a workshop as part of their orientation or continuing education to their students (e.g., Tax LLM) We have also added a mindfulness module to our Lawyer as Problem Solver program. Many law school departments integrate this skills training in their programming for staff and students (e.g., Career Strategy).

II. The Student Bar Association (SBA) Role in Wellness Programming

Students who have great interest in wellness programming can join this effort through participation in SBA committees that focus on personal development and well-being. Individual and group participation can make a major difference in promoting the culture in legal education and the profession by assisting students develop positive coping skills and develop a sustainable, balanced approach in their career. Some of their responsibilities include:
1. Create awareness of mental health issues facing law students and the profession in order to acknowledge, normalize and address them rather than avoid, repress, and perpetuate.

2. Offer programming focused on wellness and helping students cope in a healthy way.
   a. Offer these programs at key times when students are at the highest risk.
   b. Attend the workshops and events offered.
   c. Help market events and create student and faculty panels and discussions throughout the semester.
   d. Incorporate existing and traditional committee events into new wellness programs being offered.

3. Ideas for SBA Committees or Mental Health Committee
   a. Bring faculty and students together for a "lunch time" talk on law school Mental Health issues
   b. Develop information posters on Mental Health-related topics
   c. Invite guest lecturers into the community.
   d. Facilitate a monthly "Mental Health roundtable" to discuss critical issues facing the law school.
   e. Develop programs for the ABA law student division National Mental Health Day
   f. Organize final exam stressbusters
   g. Create a student organization on mindfulness