

**American Bar Association
Law Student Division**

“Law’s Cool: Creating Change with Civic Education”



***ABA Law Student Division
Work-A-Day Community Service Program
“Law’s Cool: Creating Change with Civic Education”
October 2010***

American Bar Association Law Student Division

Public Interest Committee

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"It cannot be doubted that in the United States the instruction of the people powerfully contributes to the support of the democratic republic."

Alexis de Tocqueville

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Table of Contents

What Is Work-A-Day?	1
The Crisis of Civic Disconnect in Our Youth	2
Lack of Knowledge.....	2
Lack of Curriculum Focus	2
Lack of Participation	2
Background Information	3
Lack of Knowledge.....	3
Lack of Curriculum Focus	3
Lack of Participation	4
Project Ideas for Your Campus	5
Community Advocacy.....	5
Develop Educational Materials	5
Educate the Community	6
Educate Law Students	7
Fundraising.....	7
Getting Started	9
Create a Committee	9
Determine the Objective	9
Measurability and Accountability	9
Make a Plan	10
Tips for Success.....	11
Avoiding the Pitfalls.....	12
Helpful Resources	13

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What Is Work-A-Day?

Work-A-Day is the annual public service project of the ABA Law Student Division, which brings law students from across the country together to participate in a one-day public service project in their communities. The 2010 Work-A-Day theme is civic education and we have entitled this year's program "**Law's Cool: Creating Change with Civic Education.**"

Law schools and law students are encouraged to create activities and events during the first two weekends of October (or any other day/week/or month that is convenient to your law school) to contribute to the civic education of the youth in your communities.

This Work-A-Day Tool Kit will help get you started, but please feel free to be creative in designing programs that target the unique educational and civics-related challenges in your community. This is a meaningful way for **law students to give back** to the community, helping educate youth about the critical but often-neglected subject of civics and showing youth how they can participate in our country's future by engaging with it today. The Law Student Division encourages all law students and law schools to get involved by implementing a Work-A-Day initiative this year. Your community will benefit from your efforts.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the ABA Law Student Division Public Interest Committee members:

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The Crisis of Civic Disconnect in Our Youth

The following is an illustration of the influences that create the need for law student involvement in educating youth about our government, its workings, and its sustained vitality only through their participation. While this is not an exhaustive list, it will provide insight into the ways by which students in your community can be most helped. In sum, the Work-A-Day program you design will be most effective in overcoming negative influences as you educate the community on civic-related issues, which will provide awareness and ultimately create change.

Lack of Knowledge

Students today are entering the ranks of “voting citizens” with little understanding of the structure of their government. High school graduates are unable to enumerate basic aspects of our system of government, recognize the implications of that system on their personal freedoms, or understand the nature of other systems of government for comparison.

Lack of Curriculum Focus

With the increased classroom focus on results in the core aspects of curriculum, such as mathematics and science, an increasing number of curricula are sacrificing civics instruction in favor of core subject areas. Many states are not just making this sacrifice in the short term, but are instituting policies such as eliminating state teacher certification in civics that indicate this change is permanent. As a result, it is important for our communities to make up the deficit and prepare our youth for their proper role in our society.

Lack of Participation

The recent presidential election was notable for the large number of young voters. While this recent turn of events is a step in the right direction, it is an outlier, as the young voters demographic has historically had the lowest turnout of any age-group. Even where students have an understanding of the electoral process, many hold the view that participation is unimportant. Part of your Work-A-Day program should inspire students to take up their role as voters, whose opinion and participation matter for our country to succeed in the democratic experiment our forefathers started more than 200 years ago.

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Background Information

The following information can be used in marketing to your law student population as well as working with local partners in order to finalize your 2010 Work-A-Day programming.

Lack of Knowledge

"[The republic] can be lost, it is being lost, it is lost, if it is not understood. [What is needed is] the restoration of the self-identity of the American people."

Justice David Souter¹

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration question bank is used to test the knowledge of immigrants seeking citizenship, and citizenship applicants correctly answer the 100 questions an average of 92.7% of the time. A recent survey by the Goldwater Institute,² involving students answering only 10 questions from the bank, found that:

- Over two-thirds failed to identify the two parts of Congress
- Half of the students could not identify the two main political parties
- 85% did not know the length of a Senator's term of office

The same study showed that law students have a role to play, finding that more than 90% of students were not aware of the number of Supreme Court justices.

Lack of Curriculum Focus

The decrease in civics curriculum focus has led to a correlative decrease in youth civic engagement over the same period.³

"Rather than being revamped, civics education has been all but removed from our public schools... [leading to youth being] disengaged from our civic life".

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.⁴

¹ *Souter Decries Lack of Civics Knowledge, Plans to Do Something About It.* Debra Cassens Weiss. ABA Journal, May 21, 2009.

² "Freedom from Responsibility: A Survey of Civic Knowledge Among Arizona High School Students." Matthew Ladner, Ph.D. Policy Brief, Goldwater Institute. June 30, 2009.

³ Niemi, R. "Trends in Political Science as They Relate to Pre-College Curriculum and Teaching." Paper presented at the Social Science Education Consortium, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, June 22-25, 2000.

⁴ Joel Connelly, "O'Connor: Flawed education leaving Americans ignorant of government" Seattle Post-Intelligencer, September 15, 2009.

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Lack of Participation

Participation correlates to civics knowledge, as exemplified by the discrepancy between voter participation among college students and those who do not go on to college.⁵

Voters between the ages of 18-21 have experienced the highest decline in voter turnout (at least 13%) among all age groups since 1972, the first year they were eligible to vote.⁶

Youth don't believe there are tangible results of voting, especially with regard to the issues most important to them.⁷

⁵ National Association of Secretaries of State. *New Millennium Survey: American Youth Attitudes on Politics, Citizenship, Government, and Voting*, "Section Four: Political Socialization," 1998.

⁶ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). "Research and Information: Political Participation and Voting," www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/pol_partic.htm

⁷ Institute of Politics. *Campus attitudes towards Politics and Public Service (CAPPS) Survey*. Harvard University, Kennedy School for Government, October 2001. www.ksg.harvard.edu/iop/2001-IOP-Survey.pdf.

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Project Ideas for Your Campus

The Public Interest Committee is pleased to provide you with some suggestions and quick ideas for student leaders at law schools to organize on your campus. We encourage you to read more on our website (www.abanet.org/lzd/work-a-day/).

Community Advocacy

- Identify key legal aspects of civic education that are going unaddressed, using the previous considerations (lack of knowledge, curriculum, and participation) as your starting point.

Develop Educational Materials

- Identify local providers of civic education. These organizations can include law school clinical programs and local and state bar associations. Collect information on the services these organizations provide and offer to help them advertise their services. Additionally, consider contacting these organizations to provide legal research and client support.
- Create literature or informational materials on civics that can be disseminated to people interested in participating in the initiative. Synthesize these materials so that community members can understand the extent of this need. Distribute these materials through organizations that reach large segments of your community such as community centers, labor unions, churches, malls, grocery stores, and student unions.
- Identify local and national organizations in your community that are involved in educational outreach to primary and secondary school students. Create materials such as pamphlets, posters and fliers that identify these organizations, explain what these organizations can specifically provide to students in your community, and distribute these materials to locations in your communities that target individuals who may have children, or oversee students, who would benefit from the help.
- Author an article for your local newspaper (city, regional, school, etc) about the deficiency in civic education and the implications for the future of both students and our country.
- Spend a weekend with students from your law school investigating alternative means of delivering civic education to students. Compile this list and distribute in community centers.

American Bar Association Law Student Division

Educate the Community

- Approach local schools about distributing materials or holding a symposium for their students, parents, and other community members on civic education.
- Contact a civic education organization in your community. Sponsor an event at your school or at a community center in which you discuss how to best bring civics knowledge to students. Assemble this information and disseminate in your community.
- Host a Pancake Breakfast or Spaghetti Dinner made by students. Advertise that admission is free with their children. Invite local professionals to speak at the breakfast or dinner about our governmental structure and the importance of participation. Think of providing parental and youth activities so that each group is able to gain the most benefit from the event.
- Identify schools in your community that especially suffer from the lack of civics-focused curriculum. Specifically, consider talking to non-traditional parent-students at your law schools about the curriculum being offered to their children.
- Coordinate with local schools a date and time when groups of law students can give short lessons to students in their classrooms, of a type and length that doesn't impinge upon the already-stretched school schedule. This is a great opportunity to involve non-traditional students at your school in an activity that will cater to their desire to be involved in their children's lives, and their enthusiasm in this regard will spur other law students to participate.
- Identify local polling places and coordinate with high schools to advertise the locations to their voting-eligible students. Consider organizing an event that will bring these students together on a weekend during the voting period to turn casting their vote into the fun and socially engaging experience it should be.
- If your state allows it, provide instruction to students about the process for becoming registered to vote, including their parents if the children are of a younger age. Younger students will be inspired to learn more about their civic responsibilities if they see their parents taking an active role.
- Sponsor a brunch for 50+ community members. The students can serve the food while participants engage in group discussions of the difference in the civics knowledge of youth, the lack of civics-focused curriculum, and the implications for the future of our nation. Consider inviting a leader from a local, civics-education organization to speak to these community members about ways they can donate their time and efforts to help alleviate the problem.

American Bar Association Law Student Division

- Encourage and develop relationships with local schools to help sponsor a day in which students visit their local Congressperson, City Hall, or any local government official's office. This will create a practical understanding and provide context for how the local government structure actually functions.

Educate Law Students

- Contact the local and state bar associations and assist in the creation or implementation of primary and secondary school outreach curriculum on civic education that can be implemented more broadly.
- Gather information from students in your law school and in surrounding law schools. Contact your SBA leaders, ABA Representative, and ABA Circuit Governor to communicate ideas and projects that have greater effect.
- Create materials that can be distributed at law schools to discuss the need for their participation and ways they can help in an individual capacity. Conduct a workshop at your law school, and if possible, in conjunction with other law schools, to explain national and law school-specific programs and organizations that they can become a part of to help further civic education.

Fundraising

The above events and programs might require financial contribution, and the following are ideas to fund those events. For example, the civics lessons might be made more engaging if the law students volunteering to teach dressed in the role of various historical figures or governmental bodies.

- Approach community businesses to sponsor a bowling event in which sponsors pay a small amount of money per pin knocked down and extra amounts for spares and strikes. Serve refreshments at a minimal cost and donate proceeds.
- Climb the stairs to the top of a tall building in your city. Sponsors can donate a certain amount for every floor climbed. This same activity can easily be accomplished with similar distance athletic pursuits such as running, biking, or walking a particular distance and garnering sponsorship.
- Host a law student race, run, basketball game, softball game or boxcar derby.
- Host an art show for children. Sell hot dogs, hamburgers, baked goods, and other easily prepared food.

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- Work with the neighborhood Chamber of Commerce to have merchants donate items, gift cards, and other items. Use these items as give-aways at your various events, such as awards for students who pay attention to the classroom lessons, or as a drawing to bring students, parents, and law students to the various informational sessions.
- Work-A-Day takes place in October. The historic nature of civic education lends itself to colorful depictions of historic context, and allows the lessons to be brought to life for your audience. Have fun with the potential.

American Bar Association Law Student Division

Getting Started

Create a Committee

The first step in developing a successful Work-A-Day initiative is to create a planning committee, comprised of faculty, staff, and students that are charged by your school organization or administration with developing and implementing a plan for a successful “**Law’s Cool: Creating Change with Civic Education**” campaign.

- It is important that you put together a diverse team, council, or committee of the proper size. Remember that inclusion is better than exclusion. In fact, this year’s Work-A-Day initiative is perfectly suited for participation by non-traditional students, who may have children of their own who would benefit from a better knowledge of civics. Find a way for willing individuals to participate. It is important to create a broad base of participation. Diverse participation will cultivate a well-rounded program that will ultimately create a greater impact in the community.

Determine the Objective

- The committee should define its overall objective. Do you want to reach out to the students in your school, the community, families in the community or a combination of all three?
- Consider whether your main objective is to disseminate information, fundraise or offer hands-on contact through an organization. It could be a combination of all these or some variant that we have not mentioned.
- Support for your public service initiatives from all levels of your law school is important, but support from administration is critical. If you are interested in accomplishing multiple tasks, consider creating teams co-chaired by members of the administration. This allows the committee to have authority and legitimacy while serving in an advisory role for the administration.

Measurability and Accountability

- For your public service plan to be successful, it must have two components: (1) it must be measurable and (2) there must be accountability. Committees help create accountability. The committee should develop benchmarks that helps track their progress and aids in reporting to school administrators.

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Make a Plan

- If your goal is to incorporate public service at your law school on a long-term basis, the length of your committee's plan will be critical. Although it is important to develop a plan that will provide long-term sustainable change, it is also important to have some short-term accomplishments to create momentum. In this case, a plan could be designed for 12 to 18 months. You could then create quarterly checkpoints for consistent follow-up.
- If your objective is to create a campaign for only the short term, then your plan should reflect those goals that you decide are most important for your current Work-A-Day project. Again, developing a plan that will include achievable goals is important to entice momentum for future campaigns. Create a timeline to include checkpoints for reviewing your progress throughout the planning process.
- Education is critical for the success of any initiative. Your committee might want to develop a "**Law's Cool: Creating Change with Civic Education**" pamphlet or PowerPoint presentation for faculty, staff, and students to review.
- For any Public Service Committee to be successful, its champions must be recognized. Present awards and demonstrate the law school's commitment internally and throughout the community.

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Tips for Success

Below are some planning ideas to keep in mind that will help your hard work pay off and ensure that your attendees will leave your program or event appreciating a unique experience.

- Recruit presenters (faculty, staff or practitioners) for your educational programs who represent different ethnic groups, gender, and lifestyles.
- Advertise your “**Law’s Cool: Creating Change with Civic Education**” initiative using creative, high-quality publicity. Try to use titles that students can easily understand and that specifically identify the topic of the program.
- Use bulletin boards to demonstrate the legal issues associated with the situation being conveyed to the youth and offer situational examples that highlight these messages.
- Make a commitment not to “*mask*” the issues or bury your initial intent by focusing on entertaining attendees. Bring the issues to the forefront of your event.
- There is a fine line between providing the facts and initiating a shock effect, which is something you want to avoid. Remember, your objective is to create a life-long passion for your cause not shocking your audience into short-term action.
- Take advantage of the various social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, etc. to help advertise your initiative, get feedback from attendees and participants, or even to share ideas with other law schools.
- Plan early. Promote your event in the law school and in the community in order to provide maximum attendance and create a link between the law school and the surrounding community.
- Consider contacting local schools, community centers, churches, and other community or educational institutions where youth are the audience to nurture.

American Bar Association Law Student Division

Avoiding the Pitfalls

In constructing a Work-A-Day event, it is important to develop your programs in a way that makes everyone feel included. There are many common mistakes that student leaders inadvertently make which could hinder their hard work. Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you plan your event.

- Check the calendar to prevent scheduling your event to coincide with any religious observance that may exclude some members of your school or community.
- Be sure to be inclusive. Provide means and accessibility to community members with disabilities. Include a diverse mixture of individuals as speakers and invited guests in your activities and publicity.
- The scope and publicity of your event should convey an open invitation to all and create interest in your cause. If you are planning a fundraiser in the evening, consider a family event. If it is a luncheon in the afternoon, consider creating an atmosphere that will entice a lively forum.
- Avoid mottos or program titles that may be misconstrued as insensitive.
- In your publicity, you want to encourage interest. Don't guilt your audience into participating. While you want to bring your cause to the forefront of your event, you also want to generate genuine enthusiasm and give your audience a sense of being part of the solution. This can be accomplished whether you are having a community fair to raise money or a forum to discuss and educate individuals about civic-related issues in the community.
- Attempt to have things donated by your local bar associations, community groups, law firms, businesses, etc. In addition to thank you letters, be sure to give donors credit for their support of your event by recognizing them in a program or with signs acknowledging the amenities they have so graciously provided.
- Don't be afraid to ask other organizations at your institution to participate even if they're not part of your law school.

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Helpful Resources

ABA Resources

- www.abanet.org/publiced/schoolshome.html (ABA Division for Public Education)
- www.abanet.org/publiced/lawday/schools/lessons/ (Sample classroom lessons for grades K-High School from the ABA Division for Public Education)
- www.abanet.org/publiced/lawday/guide2007full.pdf (Law Day 2007 Planning Guide - [Liberty Under Law: Empowering Youth, Assuring Democracy](#))
- www.abanet.org/publiced/lawday/2008/Full_catalog.pdf (Law Day 2008 Planning Guide - [The Rule of Law: Foundation for Communities of Opportunity and Equity](#))
- www.abanet.org/youthatrisk/ (ABA Commission on Youth at Risk)
- www.abanet.org/publiced/pathways/CivicLearningResource_BOOKLET_lores.pdf (Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms: An Analysis of Survey Results of Ninth Graders)
- [www.abanet.org/publiced/PED_Brochure\(Final\).pdf-2009-09-03](http://www.abanet.org/publiced/PED_Brochure(Final).pdf-2009-09-03) (Brochure - Educating the Public About the Law: The Work of the ABA Division for Public Education)
- www.abanet.org/publiced/YouthInGovtYMCA.pdf (Brochure - ABA and the YMCA Youth in Government: Partners in Civil Engagement)

Other Resources

- www.kernhigh.org/civiceducation (Kern High School District- Civic Education program)
- <http://www.civnet.org/> (Online Civic Education Community)
- <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/> (Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids)
- <http://www.billofrightsinstitute.org/> (Bill of Rights Institute)
- <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/> (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools)
- <http://www.civiced.org/index.php> (Center for Civic Education)

American Bar Association Law Student Division

- http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=246 (CIRCLE- The Center For Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)
- <http://www.civication.com/home/> (Civication. INC.)
- http://ericir.syr.edu/cgi-bin/lessons.cgi/Social_Studies/Civics (Educator's Reference Desk: Civics Lesson Plans)
- http://www.cived.net/rsrc_civren.html (National Alliance for Civic Education)
- <http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=stds> (Center for Civic Education)
- <http://www.youthleadership.net/index.jsp> (Civics Lesson Plans, Student Mock Election- Youth Leadership Initiative)