

THE POWER OF THE PACK: HOW TO CLAIM YOUR INDIVIDUAL POWER AND UNITE YOUR PACK¹

MATTHEW CORDON, RACHEL CROSKERY-ROBERTS,
CASSANDRA HILL, SARAH MORATH, SUZANNE ROWE²

Introduction

In her bestselling book *WOLFPACK*,³ Abby Wambach identifies eight rules for leading that apply not only to soccer but also to leading a legal writing program. Rule 8, Find Your Pack, simply means you are not alone. You've got your pack.

If you are a new legal writing director or coordinator who is feeling alone and overwhelmed, we invite you to join our pack! The following suggestions come from new and experienced legal writing directors, as well as a former associate dean who is now a law school dean. These are strategies new directors can use to advocate for your program as you hire and mentor your colleagues; balance expectations and responsibilities; and effectively work with diverse constituencies.

¹ This presentation was selected for the Rocky Mountain Legal Writing Conference that was to be held at University of Arizona in March 2020. For many of us, this was the first event of many cancelled due to the pandemic. We are grateful to the organizers of the conference and to Tienielle Fordyce-Ruff for creating this group of presenters in her role as chair of ALWD's New Directors Committee. We still regret that we were not able to gather.

² Matthew Cordon is Director of the Legal Writing Program and Professor of Law at Baylor Law. Rachel Croskery-Roberts is Associate Dean for Lawyering Skills at University of California, Irvine School of Law. Cassandra Hill is Dean and Professor Law at Northern Illinois University College of Law. Sarah Morath is an Associate Professor of Legal Writing at Wake Forest University School of Law. Suzanne Rowe is the James L. and Ilene R. Hershner Professor and Director of Legal Research and Writing at University of Oregon School of Law. Each of us took the lead on one section of this essay, and the introduction is drawn from the presentation proposal, written by Professor Morath.

³ Abby Wambach, *WOLFPACK: How to Come Together, Unleash our Power, and Change the Game* (2019).

1. Hiring and Mentoring

SARAH MORATH

As a director, hiring for the writing program is one of your most important responsibilities. Encourage your institution to conduct a national search. Consult other LRW directors and cast a wide net to get a diverse applicant pool. Educate your non-LRW colleagues about the legal writing discipline. Require each candidate who visits the school to give a job talk. The candidates might talk about an issue they addressed in practice, which could become an article or simply bridge the academic-practice divide. If there is no publication requirement for LRW professors, consider having candidates conduct a mock class instead of a job talk. Encourage full participation from non-LRW colleagues during call-backs.

Once the new hire is on campus, make sure onboarding is thorough and timely. Communicate early and often. Share materials including syllabi, exercises, and textbooks, and make clear that the new colleague is encouraged to use them (it's not cheating but economizing valuable time). As the new hire becomes comfortable with various logistical considerations, such as learning management systems, connect the individual to legal writing resources and national organizations. Encourage membership on committees and participation at conferences.

Hiring, mentoring, and leading a successful program will take an enormous amount of your time. So before taking on any additional responsibilities, consider how such a role aligns with your professional goals and is treated at your institution. Negotiate for additional pay, course releases, or smaller classes. Realize that you may quickly become responsible for various 1L events, such as orientation, and may be involved in year-end assessments.

In many ways, being a director is like being a dean. You are a first among equals and your team only works well when there is buy-

in. Encourage your LRW colleagues to be involved in the things that they are interested in; avoid “making” anyone do anything. Keep lines of communication open, be a good listener, and request feedback often. Share accomplishments broadly, including social media, faculty listserves, and your communications office. Run meetings efficiently. Have an agenda and end meetings on time.

Expect that much of your hard work will go unnoticed. Expect to take burdens for the team that go unseen; no one will appreciate that you took the 8:00 a.m. class so that everyone else can teach at 10:00. But as a director, you will develop many valuable leadership skills.

2. Thinking Like a Servant Leader

CASSANDRA HILL

As mentioned above, your role as a legal writing director is often similar to the position of a dean or associate dean. As a new legal writing director, you may not realize the projects you undertake and duties you fulfill are developing and honing the very skills needed to be a successful leader of a law school. Law school deans tackle a number of varied tasks daily, but there are three areas of responsibility that are pretty consistent across all institutions: (1) setting goals, (2) solving problems, and (3) finding resources. By engaging in each one of these activities as a legal writing director, you will add value to your institution and strengthen your relationship with your dean.

Setting Goals

As servant leaders, we work on behalf of our students, our colleagues, and the institution. Before assuming a new administrative role, ask yourself how you can contribute to the organization and its constituents to produce meaningful and sustainable change. We all desire to use our talents to better the

institutions in which we work, and this should be your goal as legal writing director. Think big picture about where you want the program and your team to be today, tomorrow, and in the next five or ten years.

And, don't identify your goals in a vacuum, as they should align with your dean's vision for the institution and any accreditation requirements. Study the relevant Standards issued by the American Bar Association (ABA) for academic programs and law faculty and the guidance offered in the ABA Legal Writing Sourcebook. Read articles on assessment, learning styles, and teaching methodologies. Consult with your legal writing colleagues on professional status matters and participate in conference discussions on the future of legal education. Become the resident expert on curriculum requirements and best practices for legal writing programs. Your assistance on these matters will be invaluable to your dean.

And last, but not least, identify measurable targets for the program and your team, as the targets will likely be added to the list of institutional goals and included as part of any strategic plan. Moreover, you will need to check your progress and celebrate any milestones achieved.

Solving Problems

Seasoned administrators are well versed in crisis management. And although every situation does not result in a full-blown crisis, as a legal writing director, you will sometimes face challenges in accomplishing goals and implementing new ideas. These difficulties can be overcome if you think and work like a problem solver—listen to your team and constituents, remain flexible, and be creative.

We've all experienced this situation before: Your law school needs an assessment plan or project for the university's regional accreditation review and the legal writing team has been asked to

contribute a measurable program assessment. And, it was due yesterday. As a legal writing director who is in constant communication with your colleagues, you know your team has no bandwidth to grade yet another assignment; they are exhausted. But, you also know the institution must meet this demand. Rather than overloading your team with a brand-new assignment, you find a compromise and identify a current shared project in the legal writing curriculum for which grading can be normalized fairly easily across the sections and students' competency can be measured. You have thus solved a problem for both your institution and your team and can plan for future program assessments in advance.

Another recurring difficulty is maintaining a high level of feedback on assignments as the number of students per section increases. When faced with this problem, think creatively. Feedback comes in different forms: faculty, group, and peer. Perhaps you have talented students who could serve as writing fellows or advisors and provide constructive feedback on students' assignments. These fellows also could meet with students individually to answer any questions. This extra layer of instruction or guidance allows your legal writing faculty to focus on teaching and providing feedback on larger graded assignments. It also gives talented students an accolade for their resumes.

Finding Resources

What if one of your short-term goals is to raise the legal writing program's profile or to increase your colleagues' participation in national conferences, but you are facing budget constraints? As the director, you always serve as an advocate for your program and team, but you can add value to the institution by adopting a resourceful mindset. Be willing to find the funding or information you need. Seek funding for professional development by encouraging your team to apply for external grants, such as those offered by the Association of Legal Writing Directors (ALWD) and

the Legal Writing Institute (LWI) for teaching and scholarship. Partner with local and regional law schools to host a joint legal writing conference or guest lecturer. Share innovative fundraising ideas with your dean. For example, one campaign could target former legal writing fellows or judicial clerks for donations to enhance the legal writing program through additional writing fellow positions or new initiatives, such as a “best brief” award. Tap your networks to invite legal writing scholars to speak to your faculty or organize a sitting judicial panel at your school. If you want to improve your curriculum so that it is culturally competent but don’t have an expert on your faculty, look at the resources available in our legal writing community. We have curriculum specialists who have published articles and books on this topic and often share their ideas at conferences. Be resourceful.

Your work as a legal writing director places you in a prime position to impact and serve your institution in ways that may not have been readily apparent. As a servant leader, you will set goals, problem-solve, and find resources for the benefit of the program, students, faculty, and the institution. With each new task, you are further developing valuable leadership and administrative skills and thinking like a servant leader.

3. Balancing Administration, Teaching, and Scholarship

RACHEL CROSKERY-ROBERTS

One challenging aspect of directing a legal writing program is balancing the time the time spent on teaching and scholarship with the time devoted to administrative tasks. Calendaring is key. First, if you have regular, predictable administrative duties (which could range from attending weekly administrators’ meetings and running legal writing program team meetings to hiring and managing adjuncts and visitors), schedule time well in advance. Second, consider calendaring time every day for responding to more time-

sensitive issues that arise. Having pre-determined time built in for unexpected tasks can help you avoid a complete derailment of your day.

Just as you block out time for administrative tasks, protect time for scholarship. In weeks that are lighter, plan for larger blocks of time. In busy administrative or teaching weeks, consider setting just 15 or 30 minutes aside to do smaller, more mundane tasks related to your scholarly work. Those small tasks can keep you moving forward, and they will add up.

Another challenge is finding time to work on more imaginative big-picture projects in the face of limited time and resources. If you are not careful, you may find that days, weeks, even months slide by during which you are so overwhelmed with the day-to-day administrative aspects of managing a program that you cannot find time to think about larger programmatic or curricular changes. Set clear boundaries and expectations regarding what your big picture goals are and how you are prioritizing your time. And as with every other task, calendar time in advance where possible. Set aside larger blocks of time in the summer to devote to these big picture items. Consider annual retreats to involve your team in the bigger-picture issues.

Finally, don't be afraid to put your foot down when necessary to keep the students at the center of what you do. We are teachers first and administrators second. Others may occasionally need a polite reminder that your focus in a given week has to be teaching rather than non-urgent administrative tasks.

4. Working with Multiple Constituencies

MATTHEW CORDON

As a legal writing director, you will need to work effectively with constituencies beyond your legal writing colleagues and your students. Within a law school itself, you will need to develop

working relationships with a range of other faculty and administrators, including deans and associate deans, doctrinal faculty, clinicians, and librarians. Moreover, you will likely need to work with various departments within the law school, such as career services/development, communications/public relations, and development/alumni relations. The work may extend even more broadly than the law school and require you to interact with university departments such as human resources or a provost's office. Both within the law school and within university departments, you will likely work with support staff. The staff's work can be the key to your success.

Collaborating with these different constituencies can create some challenges that you will need to understand to be able to adapt. Members of these groups will be diverse in every sense of the word. In some instances, you may be working with those who are not only unfamiliar with legal writing but also unfamiliar with legal education. Even within departments inside a law school, you may be competing for resources in terms of both financial resources and human capital. You will likely need not only to articulate the goals of the legal writing faculty but also to align and synthesize those goals with other departments or the larger university organization. These collaborations, though, can also create opportunities for your legal writing program. Remember that while you are the first among equals within the legal writing program, those outside the program will typically view you as the face of the program. They will want your input, and, in turn, you will want to provide a voice for your legal writing program. You will have the chance to promote and advocate for your program and those involved with your program.

5. Connecting with the National Pack

SUZANNE ROWE

Serving as the leader of legal writing at your school can make you feel like a lone wolf. Engaging nationally with other leaders can help. And although devoting time to national organizations might seem to run counter to our suggestions to guard your time and calendar carefully, you need colleagues who have walked your path.

Early in my time as a director, I attended a national conference where I was surrounded by other directors; the support and guidance I received sustained me for years. These colleagues listened to my lamentations about budgets and stodgy old professors who voted against my every recommendation. Then those same national colleagues offered me insights from their experiences, shared memos they'd already written to their deans, and brainstormed for solutions that would work at my school. Now that I've been directing for over twenty years, I enjoy mentoring new directors. I might not have a solution, but I can listen, share memos, brainstorm, and connect you with other resources or friends.

Your national pack is filled with mentors. ALWD's New Directors Committee offers ongoing mentoring; just write to the committee chair or an ALWD board member and ask to be added. LWI's Professional Status Committee has "toolkits" to address many of the status-related issues that directors face; its website is filled with information and committee members can offer confidential advice. And legal writing continues to be a collegial community. You can write or call just about anyone whose name you see on a listserv message, and you're likely to get a helpful response.

Conclusion

Being a director of a legal writing program is incredibly rewarding, but also incredibly demanding. Seasoned wolves are

ready to support you. Regardless of your title or theirs, we all want to foster mentorship and promote the power of the pack.