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HIGH SCHOOL SEMINARS

HIGH SCHOOL SEMINAR PROJECT
A TEACHING PROJECT

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the High School Seminar Project undertaken by the Golden Gate Law Review during the academic year 1970-1971, and makes suggestions for law students who wish to undertake similar projects in the future. The Seminar Project sent law students, individually and in teams, to local high schools in an attempt to provide lines of communication with high school students about those areas of law which interested and affected them.

The Seminar Project grew from a realization that there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the law as an institution, and that a proper assessment of the place of law is indispensable to full participation by an individual in society. As law students we have a commitment to believe in and to present the law as a viable vehicle for non-violent change.

The project worked with high school students. While they have some appreciation for the operation of the law, it was found that their thoughts and opinions of the law are generally negative ones, focusing on the injustices and inequalities. Even given this negative attitude, it was presumed that high school students are still young enough to be receptive to new ideas presented in a rational manner by law students, who are young enough for them to identify with, and who have developed some expertise in the subject matter.

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II. PREPARATION OF THE SEMINAR PROJECT

A. MEMBERSHIP

The number of students required for a project of this type depends primarily on the scope of the project, the number of topics chosen, and the techniques of presentation. It was our experience that a student could not do adequate work on more than one topic. While only one student was required to present a lecture, two or three were required for a dramatic presentation. A criteria for membership should be the ability to communicate effectively with high school students in such fashions.

The project had two editor-evaluators and nine staff members. The staff members designed and conducted the presentations. The editors coordinated the presentations and gave an objective evaluation which was used in conjunction with the self-evaluation given by the students participating. The staff was divided into: one three-member team, employing a combination lecture and dramatic presentation; one two-man team, relying strictly on free dialogue with the high school students after a brief dramatic introduction; and three one-man presentations using both straight lecture and question and answer techniques. One staff member was assigned the task of devising evaluation forms and procedures.

B. TOPICS

The project presented topics which were both interesting

to high school students, and relevant to problems they might encounter. The topics were of interest to the law students, to encourage maximum familiarity with the subject. The editors decided that the subjects would not be topics traditionally covered in law school courses.

The staff originally considered far more project topics than time and membership limitations allowed. The final choice included; Small Claims Court, Free Speech in High Schools, Juvenile Procedural Law, Draft Law, and Drug Laws.

C. TECHNIQUES

Final choice of presentation technique was impossible until the topics themselves had been chosen, since some of the topics were better suited for one form of presentation, some to others.

The techniques considered, along with their advantages and disadvantages were:

1. Straight Lecture
Advantages: suitability to any size group, ease of preparation

Disadvantages: difficulty in sustaining interest, lack of communication between class and staff members.
2. Socratic Method
Advantages: elicitation of direct response from students

Disadvantages: much more detailed preparation, with full script, prospect of complete failure if only a few students participated,
3. Dramatic Presentations
Advantages: direct involvement by students, likelihood of sustained interest

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Disadvantages; lack of direct communication
between students and staff

As the seminars evolved, all students, no matter what techniques were used, were allowed to ask questions and to request explanations of unclear points as they arose.

D. RESEARCH

Each group or individual was responsible for the necessary research. Specific guidelines were not used but each group was expected to have the ability to answer any questions which could reasonably be anticipated.

All groups consulted relevant legislation, case material and historical data. Some groups, such as Small Claims and Juvenile Rights, found it beneficial to consult experts in the field. On the average each individual spent approximately 20 hours on research.

E. SCHOOLS

Choosing the schools proved to be one of the critical problems of the early stages of the project.

Personal friendship with high school teachers provided many of the initial contacts. It was primarily through these informal contacts that the project got underway. It became obvious as more schools were added, that time limitations would not permit seminars at all schools which evidenced interest. Only schools in the immediate Bay Area were selected. In cooperation with the Curriculum Project programs were given at Capuchino High School.

Although the original intent was to present the project to as wide a variety of schools and students as possible, failure to attract any Black law students forced the project to concentrate on primarily white student bodies, drawn from the middle and lower-middle classes.

Each group was asked to give its presentation in at least four different schools. Many groups attended additional sessions at the request of the students or other interested teachers.

The schools in which presentations were made are: Tamalpais High School, Mill Valley; Capuchino High School, San Bruno; Mills High School, Millbrae; and Balboa High School, San Francisco.

III. PERFORMING THE PROJECT

A. CLASS SIZE, CLASS TIME, AGE OF STUDENTS

The seminar staff members felt that better presentations resulted when given before small classes of not more than thirty students. This was especially critical for question and answer sessions and the dramatic presentations. Most of the classes were no larger than twenty students, though one dramatic presentation was given to a combined class in an auditorium; a total of approximately 175 students. Staff members felt that such a group was less effective than a smaller group; that communication was less free.

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Most programs were designed for a time period greater than the usual fifty-minute class session. In schools such as Capuchino and Tamalpais, which had flexible scheduling, law student time needs were met. In other schools, with more rigid scheduling, the groups had difficulty dealing with the material in the available time. This problem was solved by second visits, either to finish the program, or to answer questions raised by the first presentation.

The staff presumed that classes composed of junior and senior students would be the most receptive to the project, due to their relative sophistication and experience. All presentations, accordingly, were made to upper classmen. On one occasion, when a group of sophomores was present, the students were less interested and less attentive.

B. THE PROGRAMS OFFERED

SMALL CLAIMS COURT: This program consisted of three students giving a description of how Small Claims Courts operate, their historical back-ground, and the procedures involved in bringing a small claims action. The presentation ended with a dramatic skit depicting a small claims court session. Questions were allowed at any point during the performance, and a general discussion about the law in general inevitably developed after the skit if time allowed.

DRUG LAW: This seminar was given by a student working alone. His approach was quite informal, using a lecture format

during which questions were allowed. He gave a history of drug laws in the United States, ending with a complete description of current laws, both Federal and California. The project focused primarily on what drugs are illegal, and what criminal actions may be brought for drug offenses. The project also included material on search and seizure and other relevant evidentiary questions. The extreme success of this program was probably due to the overall informality of the staff member, and the strong interest by high school students in the subject. While the teachers felt that a more stringent anti-drug stance should be taken, the students indicated that lectures on the moral aspects had been over done and they appreciated a neutral informative lecture.

FREE SPEECH IN HIGH SCHOOLS: The program began with a short skit depicting a student distributing leaflets in class, and the "high school principal" prohibiting him from doing so because: he had no permission to leaflet; he was disturbing the class; and the leaflet contained propaganda. Students were given a short time to read the leaflet, which contained sections of the California Education Code prohibiting distribution of leaflets. The remainder of the class was used for a discussion of freedom of speech, particularly in the context of high schools.

When discussion failed, questions were suggested to keep the students on the topic. To bring out the use of "time,

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place and manner" regulations of speech, questions such as "Can I distribute the leaflet at midnight?", "Can I distribute it if it causes litter?", "Can I distribute it in the middle of a busy street?" were used.

The point was made that students are persons whose fundamental rights are not lost because they are in school or on school grounds. The leaders discussed Campbell v. Rowe, a California case holding unconstitutional the regulations given in the leaflet, and the limitations suggested in that case. Other variations, such as arm bands instead of leaflets, were suggested and discussed.

JUVENILE PROCEDURAL RIGHTS: This topic was covered by a student working alone, who devoted his class time to a discussion of what rights are guaranteed, or should be guaranteed, to juveniles accused of violating the law. The California juvenile court system and practices were also discussed. The staff member pointed out major cases affecting juvenile rights, and the California law on the topic.

This topic lent itself to visual aids, particularly a chart of the juvenile court process beginning with the initial contact with the police, continuing through booking procedures, citation, detention, hearings, and detention facilities.

DRAFT LAW: The project on Draft Law was conducted by a single student who employed an informal lecture technique. He

made it clear at the outset that he was not a draft counselor, and was not qualified to discuss individual draft problems, but intended to cover the legal aspects of the selective service system. Discussion topics included enlistment and the problems it may create, each of the classifications, elements of the lottery system, order of call and other technical matters. There was a description of major Supreme Court cases and their impact on such areas as conscientious objection, delinquency procedures, and order of call.

This topic proved to be of great interest to girls as well as boys, with many questions being asked. Questions centered on registration requirements, student deferments, physical deferments, and the procedures of refusing induction, indictment, the various draft offenses and their punishments.

IV. EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

A. USE OF EVALUATION FORMS

Critics of the high school seminar project focused on the problems of effectively evaluating the program without the aid of elaborate statistical and psychological testing, which were obviously unavailable on a limited budget. Critics felt that the subjective evaluations elicited from students, law school participants and teachers would not assist in a meaningful evaluation of the project.

The purpose of the project, however, was not to educate

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high school students in the refinements of the law, but to introduce basic legal concepts with the hope of arousing awareness and interest. With this objective, results could adequately be measured by the subjective data gathered.

A form was devised which would allow staff members to record student comments and responses, as well as class size, composition, and other data. The form was in several parts, one for the responses of the editor-evaluators, one for the participants to rate themselves, one for teacher's responses and one for the responses of the high school students.

These forms, given in the appendix, were used either as a model for the reports made, or as forms to be filled in. Generally speaking, although they covered the desired areas, they did not allow enough flexibility and were abandoned toward the end of the project in favor of open-ended informal written reports.

In these the staff was responsible for a more detailed analysis and criticism of each performance. The editor-observer who accompanied each group also submitted a report which included not only his own observations, but the questions and responses of the high school students, and a critique of the program.

The reports were discussed among the members of each group and with the editor, and suggestions for improvement were made.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Although the project received an enthusiastic response from both students and faculty, and can well be regarded as a success in that respect, its value must also be measured by how well it will serve as a guideline for similar projects in the future. For that reason, problems which arose during the project, and possible solutions for them are presented.

TOPICS:

No decisions about the number or scope of topics were made prior to the selection of staff. This was quite a disadvantage in terms of the amount of time available to the project, and the general consensus is that, in the future, these decisions should be made in advance, in reliance on discussion with high school teachers and students or on the basis of successful topics from past projects.

STAFF;

Both editors and staff felt that the lack of participation by minority students seriously hampered the program. Initially, the group desired to give programs at schools of varying racial mixes, to discover the problems of communication which would arise. It was unanimously agreed, however, that the lack of black membership would handicap a presentation to black audiences, create a credibility gap and make communication difficult, if not impossible. Hopefully, another group undertaking such a project will be more successful in soliciting black

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membership.

No evening students chose to participate in the project, but if it were expanded to include evening or extension schools, allowing evening participation, evening students would be encouraged to join.

MEETINGS:

Absolutely essential to a project of this nature is a well established line of communication between staff members and project editors. The best solution appears to be a regularly scheduled meeting time, not less than once a week. The importance of regular meetings with strict attendance requirements cannot be over-emphasized since a project of this type is heavily dependent upon coordination of time and effort.

EVALUATIONS:

Future projects should avoid relying upon promises of teachers to submit written evaluations of the programs. Many of our evaluation problems could be avoided by requiring project members to conduct follow-up discussions and evaluating sessions with students and teachers.

CONCLUSION

Education in the high schools is undergoing vital changes both with regard to required and elective curriculum. Traditional high school curriculum is not sustaining the interest of students who are apparently looking for informational guide-

lines that will enable them to cope more immediately with society as well as their own problems. One of the great areas of concern to high school students is the law and how it relates, or perhaps more correctly how it doesn't relate, to them as a minority group in our society.

Since an initial purpose of the project was to destroy much of the unwarranted negativism towards the law, and outline how the law can work to students' advantage, success in terms of student interest was virtually guaranteed.

The new curriculum as demanded by the students is beyond the resources of the traditionally trained teacher. For example it is not difficult to imagine the problems facing a teacher who attempts to lecture his class in juvenile rights when his educational training is limited to basic civics or history. Law students who have done the necessary research are able to fill a void with regard to the current curriculum demands of the high schools.

With the demand for the subject matter and the willingness of both students and faculty to accept law students as teachers, the only bar to success of the project lay with effectiveness of the teaching methods used. As discussed, the problems encountered using a variety of teaching techniques were quickly overcome after the initial performances. Staff members, students and faculty concluded that the project had more than adequately fulfilled its purpose.

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APPENDIX

EVALUATION

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

School: _____
Location: _____
Class: _____ Teacher's Name: _____
Grade level(s): _____ Date: _____
Age of Students: _____ Number of students in class: _____
Predominant Ethnic composition of the class: _____
Other Ethnic groups present: _____
Economic composition of the class:

Comments:

Evaluator's names:

II. THE DISCUSSION GROUP

Names of participants:

Instructional method used by GGC group:

Why was this method chosen for this school and/or class?

Was the method a valuable one? If so, why?

Any changes to recommend in the method or its use?

III. THE STUDENT AUDIENCE

Was it attentive?

Was it responsive?

Was it courteous:

Did you sense any hostility toward the speakers? If so, in what manner?

Was any hostility perceived towards the evaluators?

Was any hostility towards the American system of jurisprudence noticeable on the part of the students? If so, in what way did the hostility manifest itself?

Were there any significant, unusual comments by the student audience?

Comments:

IV. THE TEACHER'S EVALUATION AND ATTITUDE

How is the class normally taught? (Lecture, student participation, etc.)

Was the class behavior about as usual? Did the class show more interest than normal?

Did any normally dormant students speak up, or vocal students remain silent?

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Any comments by the teacher regarding the GGC performance, its potential, its value in general or as specifically applied to this given class?

V. THE ADMINISTRATION

Any general comments by members of the administration?

Was there any presentation made by the GGC speakers to the administration prior to or after the performance? If so, what?

Comments:

VI. THE SUBJECT MATTER

What legal items were discussed by the GGC group?

What was the attitude of the students regarding the subject matter?

Any student interest in areas not covered by the GGC speakers?

EVALUATION OF FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION GROUP

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

(Same as Evaluation)

II. THE DISCUSSION GROUP

(Same as Evaluation, but add)

Any variance in method from the first presentation?

Which method appears to be more effectual? Why?

Evaluator's comments:

III. THE SUBJECT MATTER

(Same as Evaluation, but add)

Was there a variance with the legal, non-legal items discussed on the first visit? If so, what? Why the variance?

Were any previously unanswered questions by the students answered during this presentation? If so, what were they?

Comments:

IV. THE STUDENT AUDIENCE

Was the audience more attentive generally than upon the first visit?

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Was the audience more attentive upon any special areas of discussion? If so, what were these?

Was the audience more responsive than upon the first visit? If so, in any specific areas?

Was there any perceived hostility towards the GGC speakers?

Was there evidenced any hostility towards the American system of jurisprudence? If so, in what areas was this hostility?

Any general variation with the first visit?

Comments: Were there any unusual or significant comment by the student audience?

Comments: (By evaluator)

V. THE TEACHER'S EVALUATION AND ATTITUDE

How is the class normally taught? (Lecture, student participation, etc.)

Teacher comments regarding previous visits?

Was the class more attentive than during first visit?

Did the teacher hear any comments, unusual, significant, or otherwise, regarding the first GGC performance, by his students?

Was the first program better than the follow-up program, or was the reverse true? Why so?

Did any normally dormant students speak up? Or any normally vocal students remain silent?

Comments? (By the teacher)

Evaluator's comments:

VI. THE ADMINISTRATION

Were there any comments by members of the administration or were there any changes in attitude by the administration since the first visit?

Was there any presentation (orally or documentary) to the administration by the GGC speakers? If so, of what did it consist and what was the response?

Comments:

VII. SELF-EVALUATION BY THE GGC SPEAKERS

Name of speaker:

How did the GGC group function together?

How did you find the attitude of the students?

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How did you find the attitude of the faculty?

How did you find the attitude of the administration?

Was the method of presentation satisfactory? Was there good value to the performance?

Do you have suggestions for future performances?

Would it be desirable to revisit this school in subsequent semesters?

