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Introduction to Faculty Presentation Day Issue

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INTRODUCTION

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People frequently ask me what faculty members do. I reply that we teach, write and perform public service — a simple, but woefully incomplete answer. A deeper description, however, cannot be done glibly or with clever phrases. The challenge is to convey the soul of a faculty.

Saying that we are in the knowledge business sometimes helps. It allows me to convey that academic lawyers are always learning, that we are seekers of information, and that it is our responsibility to share knowledge with others. But even this explanation fails to capture the depth of the commitment that law professors have to learning about law, solving puzzles (while sometimes making even greater puzzles appear), and publishing their thoughts for others to digest, criticize, and alter.

Worse, however, is that description is itself inadequate. Passively describing a scholar's role cannot demonstrate the process of idea development and the painstaking steps necessary to constructing a compelling argument. Descriptions rarely engage the audience (or the reader) directly; they do not involve the active participation of others. The challenge, therefore, is to show what faculty members actually do, make the demonstration enjoyable, and engage students and others in the enterprise.

Through Faculty Presentation Day on April 3, 2002, New York Law School canceled classes, created a collaborative environment of exchanges between faculty and students, and had a full-day and evening devoted to showcasing faculty (and some student scholars) presenting their scholarship. The result is this issue of essays.

Faculty Presentation Day began as a challenge to the law school faculty: find an interesting topic, think about it, share your knowledge through presentations and panel discussions with other faculty members and students, make it fun, and produce a written essay (short on the footnotes, traditional to law review writing, but long on ideas).

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The faculty responded with wonderful topics and presentations and several hundred students participated in the discussions that followed.

When the editors of this issue asked for my introduction I paused, in part because these essays speak for themselves. Later, however, I became convinced that an Introduction would be an appropriate forum to explain the joys of being a faculty member and sharing scholarship with others. I'm glad I've written. It allows me to thank the student editors and welcome them as colleagues in this labor of love. It permits me to read very interesting essays that are concise, important, and exciting to read. It creates the opportunity to show the breadth of critical thinking by New York Law School faculty and students. And, it gives a real demonstration, of knowledge building at work.

This is what faculty members do. Engage and join in the fun!