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## Street Law Students Bring Creativity and Dedication to a Bronx High School

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This past fall, Street Law was offered as an experiential course for the first time at New York Law School. Street Law places law students in high schools in low-income neighborhoods, where they teach high school students and engage them in discussions about the law, their rights, and civic involvement. The program, which was founded over 40 years ago at Georgetown University Law Center, exists at many law schools around the country.

The NYLS instructors teach 10th- and 11th-grade students at the [Charter High School for Law and Social Justice in the](#)

[Bronx](#), a school co-founded by Professor Richard D. Marsico three years ago. When Professor Marsico and I were creating the NYLS course, we wanted the best program for both the law students and the high school students.

Our course meets for a weekly seminar focused on deconstructing content for high school learners and interactive teaching techniques that will engage students. During one of our first seminars, I wrote the maxim, “Talk Less, Teach More” on the board. Ten confused NYLS students looked up at me, very concerned that they had chosen this adventure. This motto exemplifies the theory that high school students learn better when they do most of the talking, explaining, analyzing, and discussing.

Street Law strives to develop high school students’ critical thinking and analytical skills, which means the law student instructors not only have to deliver complex legal content; they must also write inventive lessons in which their students practice and apply that content in fun ways. Our instructors adopted the learner-centered approach and immediately began crafting amazingly creative lessons. Instructors submit weekly reflective journals; one described her favorite moment of the lesson as “where students take control of the class, lead the discussion, and are able to teach themselves or other students in the class by relating our topics to their own real-life examples!”

In the first couple of weeks, the instructors struggled as the high school students tested their new teachers. Then, the instructors all seemed to find their stride, and the classrooms reflected that confidence. One instructor practically skipped with joy out of her classroom, thrilled to finally have made that meaningful connection with her students. She sent us an email after class stating, “BEST CLASS EVER!!!” Another instructor wrote in her journal, “I continue to be in awe of my students, their reactions and views on the topic we discussed, and their potential.” The positive energy was overwhelming in all of the Street Law classrooms. It was a perfect reflection of the hard work the instructors have put into each lesson since week one.

Although the purpose of Street Law is to teach high school students, the instructors are also developing lawyering skills. They are practicing dissecting legal concepts for non-lawyers and analyzing legal problems. In addition, they are expected to respond to endless unscripted questions. In her journal, an instructor wrote, "I really do think that they are learning in the class and that they do care about what we are teaching them." She continued, "I feel like I am also learning from them every week."

Ever since I took the Street Law Clinic myself at Georgetown many years ago, it has been my dream to start a program in New York City. I am so incredibly proud of our instructors and what they have accomplished. They are creative, caring, and dedicated, and the high school students respond to the effort they see from their teachers.

*This article originally appeared in the January 2018 edition of "Students in Action," a periodic newsletter published by the Office of Clinical and Experiential Learning at New York Law School. You can reach Amy Wallace at [Amy.Wallace@nyls.edu](mailto:Amy.Wallace@nyls.edu).*

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