Northeastern University
School of Law

New England Legal Writing Conference

"A Compelling Interest:

Engaging Students, Colleagues, and Our Institutions in a Changing World"

Friday, November 20, 2026

Hosted by Northeastern University School of Law

230 Dockser Hall
65 Forsyth St.
Boston, MA 02115

8:30 – 9:00	**Check-In and Light Breakfast** Dockser Hall Main Entrance (65 Forsyth Street)
9:00	**Welcome** **Margaret Hahn-DuPont** Director, Legal Skills in Social Context Program Northeastern University School of Law
9:05 – 9:55	**Session 1** **Kathy Luz and Marni Goldstein Caputo**, Boston University School of Law *No One Said Lawyering Was Easy: Building Resilience and Engagement in the 1L Lawyering Skills Classroom* **Eugene Kim**, University of San Francisco School of Law *The Rational Shortcut: Generative AI, Incentives, and Student Engagement*

10:00 – 10:50 **Session 2**

Joseph Hummel, UNT Dallas College of Law
Client-Centric Legal Writing Assessments: Engaging Students Beyond the Written Page

Betsy Byra and Seth Reiner, Suffolk University Law School and Boston University School of Law
Beyond the Memo: Engaging Students Through Real-World Email Simulations

---

11:00 – 11:50 **Session 3**

McKenzie Osborne and Amy Milligan, University of South Carolina School of Law
Small Groups, Big Outcomes: Encouraging Student Engagement Through Low-risk Supervisor Meetings

Craig T. Smith, University of North Carolina School of Law
Engaging Students and Faculty by Integrating a Jury into Experiential Learning Tasks

---

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch and Keynote Address**
Vickie Henry, Associate Justice, Massachusetts Appeals Court

1:00 – 1:50 **Session 4**

Rebecca Moor and Rosa Kim, Suffolk University Law School
Popping the U.S. "Bubble": Fostering Intellectual Humility and Global Perspectives in the Legal Skills Classroom

Misti Duvall, Boston College Law School
Legal Reading

2:00 – 3:05 **Session 5**

Gabriella Mickel, Wayne State University Law School
Using an Escape Room to Engage Legal Writing Students

Alba Morales, Brooklyn Law School
A Guided Approach to Self-Review: The First IREAC Assignment

Louis Jim, St. John's University School of Law
Oral Argument Drills As Formative Assessments

3:10 – 4:00 **Session 6**

Udoka Nwanna, Mitchell Hamline School of Law
Increasing Engagement by Cultivating Intuition in Law Students and Nurturing the Unseen

Mary Frances Richardson and Stevie Leahy, Suffolk University Law School
Pressing Pause: Reflection as a Tool for Sustained Engagement in the Classroom and Beyond

---

Presentation Descriptions

Session 1

Kathy Luz and Marni Goldstein Caputo — No One Said Lawyering Was Easy: Building Resilience and Engagement in the 1L Lawyering Skills Classroom

Many of our students have exhibited extraordinary personal resilience in their lives leading up to law school, and we are regularly awed by their strength. Yet, for a variety of reasons, they often arrive at law school without the academic and professional resilience that is critical to a successful law school experience and eventual legal practice.

In this presentation, we will discuss how we utilize the yearlong 1L lawyering skills class to help students develop academic and professional resilience, an inward-facing character-based skill critical to professional identity formation.

Our approach to building resilience in the 1L skills classroom is tied to scientific principles, with a specific focus on neuroscience principles. We employ these scientific ideas to help students develop a growth mindset and overall resilience in our course and beyond. Through this process, we increase student engagement in the learning process and make them a partner in building a skill so critical to both law school and academic success.

Eugene Kim — The Rational Shortcut: Generative AI, Incentives, and Student Engagement

Most conversations about generative AI in legal writing courses focus on either student integrity or the effects on student learning. We ask how to detect, limit, or ban its use, or whether it helps or hinders students' skill development. This presentation begins from a different place, with a question about engagement: what do our assessments reward, and does that invite students to engage with the work itself or only with its product? When the finished product is what earns the grade, relying on AI is a rational choice.

My diagnosis, then, is that the incentive structure, rather than a student's character or dedication to learning, is at the center of whether students engage with the work itself or only with its product. What would make the work itself the reward? The aim is not a better system of rewards but a task students find worth doing for its own sake. I will then sketch what an answer might look like at different levels of instructor control, from restructuring an entire assessment to changing only how an assignment is framed.

Attendees will leave with a different way to frame AI-related engagement problems and questions to take back to their courses, programs, and colleagues.

Session 2

Joseph Hummel — Client-Centric Legal Writing Assessments: Engaging Students Beyond the Written Page

Legal writing courses have traditionally relied on assessments like the objective memorandum and persuasive brief to develop foundational writing, research, and analytical skills. Beneficial as

they may be, these assessments can often overlook the critical lawyering skill of communicating directly with clients and other non-lawyers. This presentation explores how legal writing professors can incorporate client-centric assessments into the first-year curriculum while building on, rather than replacing, traditional legal writing assignments.

This presentation focuses on two related assessments: a plain-language client memorandum and a simulated client interview. These assessments can be incorporated into an existing curriculum without displacing the objective memorandum or persuasive brief. The presentation will discuss how these assessments can fit within an existing assignment sequence and will provide sample assignments, interview materials, and grading rubrics that professors can adapt for their own courses. It will also consider the increased importance of client-centric communication in light of assessments incorporated into the NextGen Bar Exam.

Betsy Byra and Seth Reiner — Beyond the Memo: Engaging Students Through Real-World Email Simulations

Engagement is at the heart of effective legal writing instruction, but first-year students often encounter legal analysis through lengthy, highly structured assignments that can feel disconnected from the work lawyers actually perform. How can professors help students transfer the skills they learn through these traditional assignments into new contexts while engaging them more deeply in the professional role they are preparing to assume?

This presentation explores email simulations as a simple, adaptable way to increase student engagement by asking students to step into the role of a practicing attorney.

Utilizing two different approaches, we will demonstrate how small changes to the traditional legal writing curriculum can create meaningful opportunities for experiential engagement without requiring professors to sacrifice substantial class time or add another major writing assignment. Attendees will leave with two concrete models that can be adapted to different courses, subject matters, and institutional needs.

Session 3

McKenzie Osborne and Amy Milligan — Small Groups, Big Outcomes: Encouraging Student Engagement Through Low-risk Supervisor Meetings

In this talk, we'll discuss our use of small group, supervisor check-in meetings and written, in-class follow up to encourage and engage our students in their legal analysis, while also providing them with accountability for their own learning.

We require our students to discuss the law and analysis in assigned small groups, first among themselves to prepare for their meetings with us, and then with us as their supervisors.

Students then draft the relevant rules for the memo assignment and turn the draft in. This is an individual activity with limited feedback, requiring each student to take accountability for the content of his or her own memo and to demonstrate their learning from the small group meetings. Importantly, students must write the rules by hand, increasing their level of engagement with the law, as opposed to just copying and pasting from a case or using AI to help them draft a rule.

We can provide examples of typical exercise that we use to structure these conversations before, during, and after the small group meetings.

Craig T. Smith — Engaging Students and Faculty by Integrating a Jury into Experiential Learning Tasks

Engagement is a feature of both active learning and courageous teaching. Engagement is also a feature of juries.

One way to engage students effectively and enjoyably, while also fostering collaborative learning, is to integrate into a course a very streamlined, simplified partial trial before a mock jury. Shorter jury-related options exist too. These include writing assignments that require students to address juries or to advocate regarding jury selection, instructions, verdicts, or deadlocks.

My presentation will address ways to engage students in experientially exploring jury roles, rules, and limitations, while highlighting opportunities and challenges in doing so. I'll also briefly address how jury-oriented assignments can engage faculty.

Session 4

Rebecca Moor and Rosa Kim — Popping the U.S. "Bubble": Fostering Intellectual Humility and Global Perspectives in the Legal Skills Classroom

As professors, we know that effective lawyers must think critically, evaluate competing arguments, and formulate reasoned judgments by weighing all available options. Yet when we teach students how to become effective lawyers, we may inadvertently limit their thinking by confining our perspective to U.S. law. This is especially short-sighted in a world where legal matters are increasingly borderless and cultural diversity is a domestic reality.

Exposing students to the law outside of our own legal system helps to foster the critical thinking, cross-cultural competency, and professional identity formation skills that are not only mandated by the ABA but also essential to lawyering.

This presentation will explore straightforward, practical ways legal skills professors can incorporate a basic understanding of other legal systems into their existing legal writing classes without the need for specialized expertise or curricular restructuring.

Misti Duvall — Legal Reading

Building on recent scholarship and conference panels about the decline of reading skills among law students, this presentation details an experiment-in-progress on integrating legal reading more intentionally into the legal writing classroom. Reading improves key human skills like critical thinking and problem-solving and helps students engage more deeply. Critical reading is also a crucial skill for new lawyers in the midst of rising legal AI. This presentation provides an example of professional engagement enhancing student engagement.

Session 5

Gabriella Mickel — Using an Escape Room to Engage Legal Writing Students

This presentation introduces a legal writing escape room that transforms skills review into an interactive, collaborative challenge. Working in teams, students complete a series of legal

writing and analysis tasks. Successfully completing each challenge provides information needed to locate the next task, with the ultimate goal of "escaping" the classroom before time expires.

Drawing on my experience designing and using an escape room in my fall 1L legal research and writing course, I will briefly discuss how to identify appropriate learning objectives, turn ordinary legal writing exercises into interconnected challenges, organize the logistics of the activity, and ensure that the game mechanics support (rather than overshadow) the learning objectives. I will then give attendees an opportunity to participate in a portion of the escape room I designed. Participants will leave with a Google Drive link to the complete set of materials I used, along with a practical guide for designing an escape room for their own courses.

Alba Morales — A Guided Approach to Self-Review: The First IREAC Assignment

In this presentation, I will discuss a worksheet I designed to guide students through self-review of their first IREAC assignment. The worksheet uses a variety of approaches, asking students to use checklists, highlight specific parts of their submission, compare their work to a sample, summarize components of their work, and answer open-ended questions. The worksheet concludes by asking students to identify one question they would like the professor to answer before their next writing assignment is due, which helps the professor understand what areas need more attention.

Louis Jim — Oral Argument Drills As Formative Assessments

The 1L spring semester typically culminates in an oral argument on their trial motion or appellate brief. Using oral argument drills as formative assessments, students are given multiple opportunities to practice oral advocacy throughout the semester. They are designed to be performed during class time. Students are not given advanced notice of the oral argument drill, and thus, they are not expected to prepare for them before class (nor would they be able to do so). In class, students are provided with the closed universe hypothetical and law. They then work in groups for about ten to fifteen minutes to develop arguments. Students then make individual arguments from their seats. The hypotheticals and the law are not related to the semester-long trial motion or appellate brief, exposing students to other areas of law. I will also provide conference attendees with the hypotheticals and law that I've used.

Session 6

Udoka Nwanna — Increasing Engagement by Cultivating Intuition in Law Students and Nurturing the Unseen

Thoughtfully curated ways to bring the "woo-woo" (i.e. spiritual intuition) into the classroom that will increase student engagement, increase class cohesion and internally foster a desire to elevate the legal profession, one lawyer at a time.

In addition to being a lawyer and law professor, as a teacher and guide for metaphysical studies/practices, I will discuss how intuition plays a key role for students in law school and forms the foundation for a successful career in law. Instilling these little-discussed and innate aspects of human nature at an early law school stage allows the students to take ownership of their learning and gain deeper understanding of their roles as future attorneys.

Mary Frances Richardson and Stefanie Leahy — Pressing Pause: Reflection as a Tool for Sustained Engagement in the Classroom and Beyond

In our fast-paced academic environment, both students and instructors frequently experience cognitive overload, burnout, and disengagement. These impacts are compounded by the rapid integration of generative AI and a polarized political climate. In response to these challenges, true engagement requires more than continuous activity; it demands intentional stillness. This interactive presentation explores how structured and responsive reflection serves as a vital pedagogical and professional mechanism to restore focus, deepen learning, and foster meaningful institutional engagement.

Our presentation addresses engagement at two interconnected levels: student engagement in the classroom and faculty engagement in professional practice. To model the core themes of our proposal, this session is designed for dialogue and participation.