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**LEGAL EDUCATION IN A PANDEMIC: A CRISIS AND ONLINE
TEACHING REVEAL WHO MY STUDENTS ARE**

SONIA M. SUTER *

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic upended things for everyone across the world in so many ways, including at universities and law schools. In switching to online teaching in the mid-semester last spring and continuing to teach first-year law students online this past fall, I have witnessed the strength and compassion of my students even in the face of the challenges of the pandemic, online learning, and political unease in our country. I have been heartened and bolstered by their deep commitment to building community with one another.

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On March 10, 2020, our university announced we would move to online teaching in just a few days. While we were far from alone—we joined universities across the country in this inevitable response to the COVID-19 pandemic—the decision was frightening. Luckily, I was not teaching two classes with a total of 200 students like I had the semester before. I was only teaching two courses, one with fifty students and the other with twenty-five. Nevertheless, the decision posed many challenges. First, I had never run a virtual meeting, much less taught a course online. I had not even (I am embarrassed to admit) learned how to share an appointment in Google Calendar, a skill I would soon rely on frequently. Second, given the rapidity with which we had to shift to online teaching, we had less than a week to prepare. That meant there was only enough time for one-hour of instruction for the whole faculty. The IT staff members were remarkable in the effort and time they put into the process; but we are a large faculty, and they were spread thin. Third, Google Meets, the platform our law school was licensed to use, could only display twenty people at a time. As a result, for classes of more than twenty students, we were advised against synchronous teaching and instead encouraged to record lectures.

This was a problem, because I do not lecture in any of my classes. Instead, I rely almost entirely on the Socratic method and class discussion. I find this pedagogical approach crucial for both my first-year and upper-level courses. First-year students, in particular, learn not only legal doctrine, but also how to develop legal reasoning skills—what some call “thinking like a lawyer.”¹ I find

1. The origins of this phrase are not fully clear. As one commentator writes, “[s]cholars are unsure when the phrase ‘thinking like a lawyer’ first became popular, but they consistently trace the origin of the concept to the 1870s when Dean Christopher Langdell introduced the case method and Socratic method at Harvard Law School.” Larry O.N. Gantt, *Deconstructing Thinking Like a Lawyer: Analyzing the Cognitive Components of the Analytic Mind*, 29 CAMPBELL L. REV. 413, 419 (2007); see also Kurt M. Saunders & Linda Levine, *Learning to Think Like a Lawyer*, 29 U.S.F. L. REV. 121, 128–29 (1994). Attribution of the concept to Langdell makes sense in light of his famous quotation, “To have such a mastery of [the principles or doctrines of law] as to be able to apply them with constant facility and certainty to the ever-tangled skein of human affairs, is what constitutes a true lawyer . . .” CHRISTOPHER C. LANGDELL, A SELECTION OF CASES ON THE LAW OF CONTRACTS, at vi (1871). Josef Redlich may also be a source of the phrase in stating that “the real purpose of scientific instruction in law is not to impart the content of the law, not to teach the law, but rather to arouse, to strengthen, to carry to the highest possible pitch of perfection a specifically legal manner of thinking.” JOSEF REDLICH, THE COMMON LAW AND THE CASE METHOD IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOLS 24 (1914). Karl Llewellyn used a more contemporary version of the phrase in describing legal education as aiming to get law students “thinking like a lawyer.” KARL N. LLEWELLYN, THE BRAMBLE BUSH: ON OUR LAW AND ITS STUDY 101 (1951). The phrase is also related to the “classic description of legal reasoning.” John Rappaport, Professor of Law, Univ. of Chi., Entering Student’s Dinner Speech at the University of Chicago Law School, *Learning to Think Like a Lawyer: What Early Childhood Development Can Teach Us about Mastering Legal Reasoning* (Oct. 4, 2017), <https://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/learning-think-lawyer> [<https://perma.cc/GV9B-QACF>] (referencing Edward H. Levi, *An Introduction to Legal Reasoning*, 3 U. CHI. L. REV. 501, 501 (1948)).

it difficult, if not impossible, to effectively teach them those skills without engaging in the process of asking students to apply legal doctrine to a hypothetical (or real-life) problem, having them respond to and anticipate counter arguments, and encouraging them to discuss the policy and ethical issues that shape or are raised by legal doctrine. As I often tell my students, you cannot learn how to play tennis or dance ballet simply by having someone tell you the rules of tennis or the various ballet body positions and moves. Instead, you learn how to serve a tennis ball or do a fouetté turn by having someone first describe and show you what is required and then trying to serve or do the fouetté yourself . . . repeatedly. You will likely fail in the first attempts, but as you repeat the process and are given feedback about how to improve your form or body alignment, you eventually succeed. Similarly, law students learn how to engage in this legal analysis through repeated dialogue with their professor and each other.

The Socratic method is even more crucial, I believe, for beginning law students who have to learn not only how to “think like a lawyer,” but also how to read cases. They are learning a new language and discovering how to glean salient points, discern which issues the court did not resolve, and understand how the court’s reasoning can be employed in other cases. Those skills, like learning Spanish or Japanese, also cannot be taught through lecture, but can only be learned by “doing” and through trial and error.

What it means to “think like a lawyer” is even less clear than its origins. *See Gantt, supra*, at 413 (“Despite the popularity of the phrase, legal scholars have not agreed on a detailed conception of what ‘thinking like a lawyer’ means.”); FREDERICK SCHAUER, THINKING LIKE A LAWYER: A NEW INTRODUCTION TO LEGAL REASONING 3 (2009) (“It is relatively easy to say what thinking like a lawyer is not. It is rather more difficult to say what it is”); Eric A. DeGroff & Kathleen A. McKee, *Learning Like Lawyers: Addressing the Differences in Law Student Learning Styles*, 2006 BYU EDUC. & L.J. 499, 500 (2006) (“What it actually means to ‘think like a lawyer’ remains ill-defined”); MICHAEL HUNTER SCHWARTZ, EXPERT LEARNING FOR LAW STUDENTS 203 (2005) (“[M]any law professors do not do a very good job defining for themselves or their students” what “think[ing] like a lawyer” means); RUTA K. STROPUS & CHARLOTTE D. TAYLOR, BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN COLLEGE AND LAW SCHOOL: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS 16 n.28 (2001) (observing that “[d]ebate abounds” as to the phrase’s meaning). The difficulty of defining the process may be, in part, because it is “neither pure art nor science.” *See Saunders & Levine, supra*, at 182. There is also some question as to whether there is even something “unique” about “thinking like a lawyer.” *See id.* at 122; SCHAUER, *supra*, at 3. Whether or not this method of analysis is unique, it clearly involves certain types of analysis. One scholar offers a useful breakdown of its many components: the “overall structure of legal thinking,” which includes “mental problem solving,” “asking questions,” “searching for coherence,” “thinking linearly,” and “crafting arguments”; “identifying legal issues,” which includes “assessing relevance,” “dissecting thought,” and “perceiving ambiguity”; “logical reasoning”; “arguing from rules”; “seeing all sides”; “attending to detail”; and “recognizing the ‘big’ issues.” Gantt, *supra*, at 437–72. In my view, these are necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, elements of thinking like a lawyer. *See infra* note 2.

But I was not teaching first-year students when we suddenly went online. I was teaching second- and third-year students who presumably have already learned these skills. I could, therefore, have argued that it was not pedagogically problematic to switch to lecture. Moreover, I might have taken the view that these were extraordinary circumstances, requiring exceptions to my general approach to teaching. But I did not, because there are other reasons to employ the Socratic method in my upper-level courses. First, I am not persuaded that all law students have fully mastered the skills of legal analysis by the time they finish their first year of law school; with first-year classes as large as 100-plus students, they have fewer opportunities to practice these skills than in smaller classes. Second, after trying an on-deck system in an upper-level course, I found the quality of class discussion and preparedness declined when not everyone was subject to being called on in class. Third, and related, because it involves a give and take between professor and students, the Socratic method encourages and requires dialogue and participation. In other words, it is a form of *active* learning, which is valuable whether students are first-year, upper-level, or LLM students. The active learning is enhanced when, in ideal circumstances, students themselves begin to weigh in with their own counter arguments, critiques, or hypotheticals.

Finally, class discussion is central to my teaching not only because it encourages active engagement, but also because policy considerations and ethics play a significant role in the subject matter of my upper-level courses—Law and Medicine and Genetics and the Law—as well as in Torts.² My upper-level classes cover topics rich for debate. Law and Medicine, for example, includes legal and ethical issues associated with contraception, abortion, maternal-fetal conflict, end-of-life-decisions, research, and organ donations. Genetics and the Law addresses eugenics, prenatal testing, newborn screening, adult testing, gene

2. Many have critiqued the goal of educating students to “think like a lawyer” on various grounds. Stephen Wizner expresses the concern that “thinking like a lawyer” fails to adequately educate students to become socially responsible legal professionals or that its purported goal is to teach “law students to separate the ‘moral’ from the ‘legal,’ to focus on the ‘legal’ aspects of a case and put aside its moral dimensions.” Stephen Wizner, *Is Learning to Think Like a Lawyer Enough?*, 17 YALE L. & POL’Y REV. 583, 587–88 (1998–99). Although it is well-beyond the scope of this essay to offer a comprehensive understanding of what it means to “think like lawyer,” I view the process and concept much more broadly than Wizner. As mentioned in note 1, *supra*, I think it includes, but is not limited to, the components described by Gantt. *See* Gantt, *supra* note 1, at 437–72. Although Wizner suggests it leaves out concerns of social responsibility, I strongly believe “thinking like a lawyer” *should* encompass moral, policy, and professional considerations. *See* Saunders & Linda, *supra* note 1, at 183–84 (noting that for students to think and act like lawyers there must be a “place [for] civics and ethics components in the curriculum.”). Indeed, in discussing cases with my students, I ask them to consider the arguments that might persuade courts to reach certain conclusions, including those concerning policy, justice, fairness, etc. Whatever the definition of what it means to “think like a lawyer,” this process is complex and is best achieved through active learning, not passive listening to lectures.

therapy, germline genetic editing, genetic discrimination, privacy, the forensic uses of genetics, and patent law. Most of the topics in both classes raise ethical and policy issues that are intellectually challenging and also deeply personal. Students often tell me how much they learn about themselves in Law and Medicine because it forces them to confront their views about intensely intimate matters like reproduction and death and dying. Virtually all my students will face some of the issues we discuss in that class with respect to themselves or family members. Some of them already have.

When the law school moved to online teaching, my Law and Medicine students and I were in the thick of the emotionally fraught section on death and dying. In Genetics and the Law, we were discussing genetic discrimination. It was not only impossible to imagine how I could turn my classes into lectures, it was also unthinkable to end these important conversations by disappearing behind recorded lectures. So instead, I bought a large whiteboard and boned up on Google Meets. I used my family as guinea pigs, I practiced with thirty colleagues, and I did trial runs with my students a day before my first class. And then, a week after the university's announcement, I entered the world of virtual teaching.

After completing the first week of virtual classes, I felt a wave of exhaustion as pent-up anxiety gave way to relief. It had not been a flop. The prevailing emotion, however, was gratitude. Gratitude for my students, who not only rose to the challenge, but went above and beyond what I could have asked for. They were prepared. They volunteered when I posed questions to the class. They supported one another in their responses. The success of interactive teaching always depends on the engagement of the students. But with the sudden switch to virtual teaching, the stakes felt higher and my dependence on their responsiveness even greater. That they participated with such enthusiasm and commitment in the face of the turmoil, stress, and disruption of a global pandemic was a gift indeed.

There were technical glitches to be sure. In every class, a few students had to sign out and sign back in. I myself "froze" during one class momentarily. My dog interrupted a dialogue with outraged barks as a neighbor dared to walk her dog past our house. I had to occasionally remind my family that "class was in session." Students had to shift locales to get better internet signals—in one case a student was in a car during class, with oak trees draped in Spanish moss in the background. And, of course, people sometimes forgot to unmute. It was odd not to hear the whole class at once and frustrating to see only part of the class when I rely on facial expressions and body language to discern whether students are confused, outraged by a particular doctrine, or amused by something another student or I said.

But as the semester progressed, my fear that online teaching could not work and that my students' commitment would wane was replaced by ever growing gratitude for their sustained devotion to the enterprise. More important, I was

beginning to realize that my decision to continue interactive teaching was not just the right thing to do pedagogically; I needed it too.

Teaching has always been personal for me. At the start of each semester, I ask my students about their background and education to get to know them and because it informs their views about the topics we discuss. I also never pretend I have no personal life. In fact, I quite intentionally mention my husband, children, and dog in class. When my son got his driver's license a year ago, my Torts students cheered when I shared the news (especially since he had featured in some hypotheticals about unlicensed drivers!). Years ago, after my daughter's first day of preschool, I bemoaned to my students how I was both proud and crushed that she told me, at only two years old, that I could "go home now." And when I was exactly halfway through my first pregnancy on September 11th, I spoke to my students not only about the importance of the rule of law and the project of the legal enterprise generally, but also how unsettling it was to consider bringing a child into the world in the midst of such events. As a female professor, I want to signal to all my students, but especially the women, that it is possible to balance career and family and that we all have lives and milestones that shape our experiences in and outside the classroom and our careers.

What I found in shifting to virtual teaching is that the use of the technology and the underlying circumstances made teaching even more personal. Jeannie Suk Gersen noted something similar in her piece, *Finding Real Life in Teaching Law Online*.³ In comparison to in-person teaching, with some of its "performative aspects" and potential to "resemble a live act before a captive audience," online teaching, she found, was "strangely more intimate."⁴ As she noted, the intimacy in some ways derives from "the glimpses into home life . . . and some erosion of strict divisions between professional and personal, between public and private."⁵

But the personal element of online teaching went beyond opening windows into students' personal spheres or the routine interruptions "by children and pets, or sounds of doorbells and vacuums."⁶ Some of the intimacy arose because of new rituals that united us and brought us closer. For example, I began every class by checking in with each student to make sure they could hear me and be heard. What was initially a technological safeguard became a way to connect with everyone individually, something we all probably needed more than ever in such troubling times. Sometimes these check-ins led to playful banter as backgrounds changed when students moved to different locales. Since many were reunited

3. Jeannie Suk Gersen, *Finding Real Life in Teaching Law Online*, THE NEW YORKER (Apr. 23, 2020), <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/finding-real-life-in-teaching-law-online> [<https://perma.cc/9ZK9-RTQ5>].

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.*

with pets, I invited students to introduce their four-legged friends at the start of class. As the student of the day introduced her pet, her colleagues offered encouraging “oohs and aahs” through the chat function. Relatedly, I found that, throughout class, the chat function allowed students to share incidental observations related to the topic we were discussing, to inject light humor, and to connect with one another as a group in a way that would not have been possible in the classroom.

Finally, in the beginning, I wrote almost daily emails to my students to explain the technological requirements as we shifted to online education. Those messages evolved into weekly emails of support for students, some of whom were isolated because they lived alone. The “weekly check-ins” included tips for dealing with quarantine; advice about how to manage the stress of the extraordinary circumstances; quarantine parodies of famous songs; cute animal videos; anecdotes about how our family was handling quarantine, including our game nights and movie choices; etc. I decided to send the same emails to second- and third-year students I had taught previously to offer support and encouragement since they were facing the same stress and anxiety. The practice evolved into such a routine that I wrote those emails almost every week throughout the rest of the semester and summer.⁷ I also set up extra virtual office hours—one session for current students and another for former students. Our law school community was no longer united by physical space, but I could still connect with students virtually, in the Google Meets classroom and through email.

Admittedly, some of the personal elements of going online may have had as much to do with the shared experience of the pandemic as virtual teaching. Going through a crisis together unites people. Because I knew my students were uneasy, unnerved, and some literally unsettled as they tried to figure out whether to stay in D.C. or go home, I tried to normalize the frustration and disappointment they felt by sharing my family’s reactions to the lock down. For example, as soon as I set up my new whiteboard, my 15-year-old daughter expressed her frustration at not being able to see her friends in person by christening the board with a drawing of the coronavirus and the captions, “F*** Coronavirus” and “You suck!” Although the cartoon was clever and creative, the messaging was hardly refined. Nevertheless, I saved her artwork and shared it with my students, both for a bit of levity and to remind them that they were not alone in undoubtedly sharing her sentiment.

Remarkably, as the daily news announced sobering increases in the numbers of COVID-19 victims, my students remained engaged, even in discussions about the removal of life-sustaining treatment and medically assisted dying. When I proposed adding a topic on the impossible rationing decisions health care

7. Giving these “dispatches” far more praise than they deserve, one student described them as “read[ing] almost like FDR’s fireside chats.”

providers might face with surging COVID-19 cases, students eagerly accepted the offer, even some from my Genetics and the Law class. The students found it to be a “teachable moment.” Several even participated in the optional class I added when we ran out of time to continue the discussion during normal class hours. Students seemed to welcome a venue to process these difficult issues even though death was such a frequent topic in the news. Framing the issues in legal and ethical terms and discussing what the laws are and should be seemed strangely comforting. There was a sense that in the midst of tragedy, we were more “together” than ever, even though we were physically separated and dispersed across the country.

It may be clichéd to say that a crisis reveals who we are, but it is true. This pandemic has laid bare the dark truths about the racial and economic inequities in our country,⁸ but it also highlighted traits I love in my students: their engagement, sense of community, and interest in learning for its own sake. In spite of a raging pandemic and an economic crisis, they were more curious, open, raw, supportive, compassionate, and above all, human than ever. When I closed the last class of the semester, I teared up telling them how important our classes had been to me in such unsettling times. Our conversations had been intellectually gratifying. But more than that, our virtual face-to-face discussions connected us more deeply and intimately than usual as we discussed the ultimate, shared human experience of life and death. It turns out that I needed the synchronous teaching as much as they did. And through it, I discovered who my students are in a way I never could have if we hadn’t gone online together.

* * *

As the fall neared and I faced the prospect of teaching Torts to over 100 first-year students online, I had to decide whether to use the same approach I had used in the spring. There were important differences to consider. The large class would make the challenges of seeing everyone very real, but with our newly acquired license to use Zoom, it would now be possible to see fifty students at once. The students and I would not all be in crisis mode like we were last spring. Granted, the pandemic was not over, but, tragically, it had begun to feel like a new normal. I imagined we would not have the same sense of weathering an emergency together. Finally, I would be teaching 1L students who would be new to both the study of law and our law school community. They would not have the benefit of an established group of law school friends to ease

8. See, e.g., Crystal Johnson-Mann et al., *COVID-19 Pandemic Highlights Racial Health Inequities*, 8 LANCET DIABETES & ENDOCRINOLOGY 663, 663–64 (2020), <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2213-8587%2820%2930225-4> [<https://perma.cc/MJ69-TFPK>]; Christopher Rugaber, *Soaring Wealth During Pandemic Highlights Rising Inequality*, AP NEWS (Sept. 21, 2020), <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-stock-prices-financial-markets-stock-markets-archive-28a44dd1a025d9b9af5a8d4ff8c5a033> [<https://perma.cc/8YRW-7WAG>].

the potential loneliness of virtual learning. Indeed, some would be studying from afar with no classmates anywhere near them geographically.

Although I contemplated filling some of the teaching hours with asynchronous teaching, I ultimately decided to teach Torts entirely synchronously. Not only had this approach succeeded last spring, but I also believed it was the best way to build community for new students. Despite the large class size and the fact that my students' were 1L students, I still found it incredibly rewarding and effective. Like last spring, there was intimacy in seeing students in their homes, with occasional glimpses of their pets, family members, roommates, etc. during class. Student engagement was also very strong. In fact, on the first day, I had to change the way I had students indicate an interest in participating. So many students had put their names in the chat box at the same time that their names ran off the screen before I could read them. Luckily, Zoom's hand-raise function, which Google Meets lacks, solved the problem. It was clear that my Torts students thirsted to be in conversation with one another. Although they had no point of comparison, some of my Torts students thought speaking in the Zoom format was less intimidating than it would have been in a large classroom; they felt like they were having a conversation with just their professor. Others, however, were intimidated by the thought that their image might take up a peer's entire computer screen, putting them on display in a way that wouldn't happen in person. Nevertheless, the vast majority participated in class discussions.

The virtual classroom also offered some clear pedagogical benefits—even for 1Ls. Students could review recordings from each class whenever they wanted to. In addition, many more students than is typical in person remained online after class to ask questions or listen to other students' questions. The discussions also lasted longer than in person. Perhaps because they didn't have to rush to get to a different classroom, and I didn't have to exit to allow another class to enter. An added benefit was that these discussions were available to the whole class because they were recorded. Similarly, office-hour attendance, which is typically high with my 1Ls, was even greater. Undoubtedly, the ease of clicking a button to attend overcame the inertia some students might experience when choosing between walking to a professor's office or going home after a long day of classes.

I will not deny that some things were lost, especially for brand new law students. Most significantly, they were denied the organic opportunities students typically have to build community: sitting next to each other, chatting before and after class, running into classmates at the library, gathering in study groups, and socializing over the weekends. Learning their classmates' names by seeing them written alongside Zoom images was no substitute.

But in spite of those barriers, they found a way to build a strong sense of community. Just like my students last spring, they sent witty or supportive comments to one another via Zoom chat at appropriate moments in class. More

than three quarters of the students joined virtual happy hours I set up to so we could all get to know one another. And a third joined for two scheduled evenings of ice-breaker activities, first, get-to-know you questions and second, game night. It was delightful to drop in on the virtual breakout rooms and see them enjoying the chance to talk to each other in a causal setting. They also offered very helpful feedback as to how I could support them during this challenging time, including suggestions that I help them organize study groups by connecting study partners. Near the end of the semester, one student suggested a version of Secret Santa. I suggested we adopt a Torts phrase for the exercise, and the class came up with Secret “Special Relationship”: The Intentional Infliction of Holiday Joy. Although we didn’t face the newness of the pandemic together, the class bonded over the uncertainty regarding the presidential election. One student quipped the morning of Nov. 4th, as votes were still being counted, “it’s ironic that we are studying intentional infliction of emotional distress after an election night like that!” And for the remainder of the week, students posted updates in the chat whenever a state’s results were called.

To say my students were disappointed that law school was online would be a gross understatement. It is not what they hoped for or wanted. But I think they took real pride in discovering their resilience and forming a community during this challenging fall. They didn’t just endure the underlying pandemic—which brought profound losses to some of them and serious illness to others—they also confronted deep concerns about the state of our country with its grave racial injustices and inequities, profound polarization, and threats to democracy. By enduring that together, they found connection and camaraderie. As we neared finals, I asked my students to write words of encouragement to share with their classmates. Their words best describe the pride and strength they felt in starting (and surviving) law school in the middle of a pandemic and everything else⁹:

- As a class, we have gone through a pandemic, an election, AND our 1L year. Clearly, we are ready for anything at this point. I know it has been hard, but just remember that everything seems impossible until it’s done. And after it’s done we’re gonna need a break and a drink.
- Chances are, this hasn’t been your year. You may have lost a loved one, are struggling with the isolation of pandemic living, or you just feel off. I am writing this to let you know that it’s okay to not be your best self right now and recognize that your best effort during this year may not be what your best effort usually is. You are living through extraordinary circumstances AND attending law school, which is usually a feat in itself.

9. Some used humorous digs at two notorious attorneys to offer encouragement, like this message: “Just remember—if Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell could graduate from law school and get paid \$20K a day to represent their client in court, we can too! Give it your best but please don’t set the curve too high for me.”

My point is, be kinder to yourself as you are doing the best you can at this moment, and it is okay for that to be enough sometimes. I believe in you.

- This has been the most challenging year for everyone but that being compounded with the stress that comes along with law school is a testament to how strong we all are and how much easier it will be to handle curveballs thrown our way in the future . . . We've got it and have faith that you know so much more than you think!!
- It's been a long and tough semester, but hang in there, we've virtually made it.¹⁰

Several also expressed support and gratitude for the community they had created in spite of being online:

- I'm proud that our [class] never turned against each other under the pressure of competition.
- Words cannot express how humbled I am to be a part of Jackson Inn.¹¹ I learned and continue to learn immensely from each and every single one of you; even those who rarely speak and only do so with great tact. I hope you never doubt your abilities, although all the greats frequently do. It helps us learn and grow. I cannot wait to meet you in person and continue to see our skills grow and develop.
- We've found a great home in Jackson Inn with an amazing support system. We will get through our first round of finals. GW selected us because they know we have the capability to grow and succeed here so I have faith in us! I look forward to meeting you and the rest of our Inn in person next year!
- I can confidently say you all are the smartest group of people that I have (n)ever met. We all have worked so hard this semester, despite each

10. While these quotes represent only a small selection of all responses of the class, themes of encouragement and resilience were plentiful. More than half the class (57% or 66 out of 115 responses) offered explicit words of encouragement. Often those statements were intermingled with a discussion of resilience (for example, that the class is now ready for or able to accomplish anything after successfully overcoming the obstacles presented by life in Fall 2021). In fact, nearly a third (32% or 37 out of 117 student responses) discussed resilience.

11. We have an Inns of Court program that "offers GW Law students support and guidance from a diverse set of advisors dedicated to enriching their law school experience and enhancing their career opportunities. As 1Ls, students are assigned to one of six Inns of Court, named after former Supreme Court Justices, and they take all 1L classes with their Inn. Their Inn remains their community for the next few years." *Inns of Court*, GEO. WASH. UNIV. L. SCH., <https://www.law.gwu.edu/inns-of-court> [<https://perma.cc/RG68-BFLU>]. The goal of the program is to help students develop professional skills and identity, form connections within the law school community, and develop skills to promote their well-being. The program, a first of its kind, received "the 2018 E. Smythe Gambrell Professionalism Award, a program of the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Professionalism." *Id.*

navigating our own personal, technical, and emotional difficulties due to COVID-19. I am seriously so proud of you all!

- It sucks that we didn't do this semester in person. But the awkward zoom meetings and jokes in the chat box made it all feel less lonesome. I appreciate that, and all of you. We'll do fine!¹²

I too would have preferred to have been in person with my wonderful Torts student this fall—to have heard their laughter as a group, rather than just witness it on a screen, and to have gotten to know them in three rather than two dimensions. Even so, I feel a deep connection with them and I believe they with one another after withstanding the challenges of 2020 in a Zoom room together. What the last two semesters of online teaching has shown me is that community can be built if there is a will and desire. I am privileged to be able to teach students who are so committed to that goal, whatever the universe throws at them.

12. Nearly one fifth of the class (17% or 20 out of 117 of the responses) discussed themes of community (such as mentions of gratitude for their classmates, the positive experiences shared by the class during the semester, etc.).