



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 26) (Jeff Welty)

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The most recent session of Faculty Lunches with the Dean was in June and the participants were Margaret Henderson, Jeff Welty, Anita Brown Graham, and Aimee Wall. This group illustrates the breadth of the School's work—in terms of topics, disciplines, and projects. In every case people have been focused on how to increase the School's impact. This post summarizes the work that Jeff Welty shared as Director of the Judicial College.



Jeff talked about the work that he and his colleagues are doing to expand the Judicial College curriculum. We have been providing judicial education for many decades, and the anecdotal feedback from court officials has been very positive. Jeff wanted to approach the question of training needs more systematically, however, and so this year he sent a survey to court officials asking about their needs. Dale Roenigk helped put together the survey and he believed that a 25% response rate would be good—it turned out to be 50%. In terms of interpreting the information, Jeff praised Jack Watts for his first-rate data visualization work that made it easy to see differences based on client groups and regions.

One interesting outcome of the survey was that the respondents rated online education as a low priority. People unfamiliar with our work often assume that we do lots of distance education for our far-flung clients, and I know that the Institute of Government in Georgia does some online education. Our clients generally have not asked for it, but that may be changing with some of our groups. I have heard that the municipal and county clerks, along with some budget officers, would like the School to offer more distance education. The Judicial College survey showed much greater interest among court officials in regional training, which is consistent with the results of a broad market research study that the School conducted a couple of years ago.



Jeff has raised an interesting question about online education. Would court officials and others make it a higher priority if they believed it could be done extraordinarily well in ways that were engaging and productive? Have they experienced anything that might make them imagine it could compare to face-to-face training? Jeff's question is an important one that we need to explore.

The survey showed a strong interest in more training for magistrates on domestic violence. The legal rules that apply to domestic violence are complex, and they get applied by magistrates under intense pressure and public scrutiny. One response will be a new course this fall on domestic violence for magistrates. The new course is possible through the help of Elizabeth Watkins-Price, whose position (Judicial Curriculum Development Specialist) was created as a recommendation from the Strategic Foresight Process. Dona Lewandowski is our lead faculty member working with magistrates, and she does a great job. It would have been hard for her to develop a new course—at least this quickly—while juggling her existing responsibilities. Elizabeth has partnered with Dona to make the course happen by assisting with the agenda, identifying and contacting possible speakers, previewing videos, and so on.



A few takeaways.

1. It takes lots of talented professionals to do our work. Dale's help constructing the survey was valuable—Jack's assistance with data visualization made it possible to deeply understand the results—Elizabeth's work on the course curriculum was indispensable. There are many, many others who regularly make important behind-the-scenes contributions, and people are generous in offering to help.
2. Jeff and his colleagues with the Judicial College illustrate our continued interest in responding to the needs of our clients. They conducted a survey, understood the results, and are creating a new course. It is easy to think of responsiveness primarily in terms of our short-term advising, and this course illustrates one of the other ways it happens.
3. How should we meet the needs of our clients who live far away from Chapel Hill? Should we make an even greater commitment to regional training? Should we explore the delivery of high-quality online training through a platform like MPA@UNC? Online education for public officials somewhat surprisingly did not emerge as a priority during the Strategic Foresight Process, and yet it feels like something we need to examine carefully in the near future. This issue has been raised in a number of the faculty funding requests, which is just one more reason to dig into it.

