



# Professor Jan M. Levine is helping Law School students master a very important art form — LEGAL RESEARCH AND WRITING

Practicing lawyers, judges, and law school faculties generally agree that legal writing is one of the most critical professional skills a lawyer can have. They also believe it is a skill that can be taught effectively in law school. Yet some law schools change their writing programs every few years without a clear idea of how writing can be taught, and without committing the necessary resources to make the program effective. With the hiring of Professor Jan M. Levine as the school's first full-time legal research and writing program director, the Duquesne University School of Law has shown that they are serious about fielding a top-notch legal research and writing program, and graduating well-trained students.

A nationally-known expert in the field of legal writing and research, Levine has more than twenty years of experience leading legal writing and research programs. Levine comes to his tenured faculty position at Duquesne from Temple University School of Law, where he built the program into one of the highest-ranking writing programs in the United States, according to faculty surveyed for U.S. News and World Report. Prior to Temple, he ran the writing programs at the University of Arkansas School of Law (Fayetteville) and the University of Virginia School of Law.

Before he began teaching legal writing and research full-time, Levine served the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as Assistant General Counsel and Assistant Regional Counsel for the Department of Social Services, and as Deputy General Counsel for the Office of Children. Before that, he was a Staff Attorney at Boston University School of Law, working on public interest programs in the areas of health law, disability law, and elder law. A graduate of the State University of New York at Albany, and a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Levine received his

law degree from Boston University. He is a nationally recognized scholar who has published many works on legal research and writing. Levine's most recent work was his contribution to several chapters of the ABA Sourcebook on Legal Writing Programs.

He is also a frequent presenter at national conferences on legal research and writing, and has had many elected and appointed positions in national organizations. Professor Levine was the founder and first president of the Association of Legal Writing Directors (ALWD); served as elected member of the ALWD's board of directors and of the board of directors of the Legal Writing Institute; was appointed to the board of directors of SCRIBES, the American Society of Writers on Legal Subjects; and served as chair and member of the ABA Communications Skills Committee.

**“LAWYERS ARE  
PROFESSIONAL WRITERS”**



“Duquesne's new writing program is designed to provide students with the fundamental writing skills that all lawyers need,” said Levine. “Legal writing is the only practical skills course required of students in most law schools. New law students quickly realize how much lawyers must read, but most students simply don't realize how much lawyers write. Our students must appreciate that lawyers are professional writers, preparing transactional and litigation documents, of course, but also writing correspondence and office memoranda, drafting legislation and regulations, crafting speeches,

and playing a critical role in the creation of business documents and government papers. Any lawyer knows that if you can't write effectively, you won't be successful.”

Duquesne's first-year law students study the fundamentals of legal research, both print-based and computer-based, using the law library and the internet as the sources for information. They also

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learn to prepare the two essential documents at the base of law practice: predictive office memoranda and persuasive advocacy pieces. The goal of the fall semester is to make students competent in writing the types of research-based memos they will be preparing in their first summer after law school, and in their future work as practicing lawyers. The spring semester is focused on persuasive writing and oral advocacy, in the context of an appellate brief with an accompanying moot court argument.

Levine lists three keys to an effective writing program: “First, you must have dedicated students willing to do far more writing than they’ve ever had to do before. As I always tell my students, the average lawyer writes more than Stephen King; he or she just won’t make as much money! Second, you need a small student-to-teacher ratio, because students need individual guidance, and the best way to provide that is to have the faculty critique each student’s work and then meet with the writer for an individual conference, leading to a revision. Third, classes should be discussion-based seminars, in which students and faculty engage in a open dialogue about legal analysis and the structure of the documents, and in which there is no ‘hiding the ball’ about the material at hand.”

“The spring semester’s moot court program will give the students their first opportunity to write, talk, look, and act like real lawyers,” he said. “For most students, the process of writing an appellate brief and delivering an oral argument is a tremendous experience, and probably the capstone of the first year of law school. We are going to involve our alumni, a tremendous asset, in this program, and we will invite many to come back to Duquesne this spring and sit as ‘judges’ alongside the writing faculty.”

Levine is the only full-time faculty member in this new program – for now. The law school has plans to hire other full-time writing teachers in the near future, and currently employs an impressive group of adjunct professors in the writing program (*see page 8*). “I have a great deal of respect for the adjunct professors in the writing program,” Levine said. “It is incredibly time-consuming to be a professor in this new writing program. Beyond the time spent preparing for and teaching class, each teacher spends one to two hours critiquing each major assignment a student writes. Many more hours are invested in individual meetings with each student to discuss the critique and the revisions to be made for the next round of review.”

Duquesne looks to be on the fast track to a nationally-renowned writing program. “It often takes three years to have a writing program’s traditions set in place,” Levine admitted. “But I have already seen a change in the students. They know they are further along the path than are their peers at other law schools, and they’re proud of what they’ve accomplished so far. I’ve seen student work-product this semester that was as good as anything I’ve seen at the other law schools where I’ve taught, and I think we’re well on the way to turning out the best-prepared students we’ve ever graduated from the Law School. And Dean Guter and the university’s administration have been wonderful, providing me with the resources needed to build a high-quality writing program.”

So why did Levine choose to relocate to Pittsburgh and start a program from scratch? The choice was rather easy. “Dean Guter is the reason I came to Duquesne. From his years in the JAG Corps, Dean Guter understands the critical place of writing skills in modern law practice. He is deeply committed to the writing program as the foundation for student training, and he’s made it his number-one priority. Plus, as an alumnus, he’s extremely passionate about the law school and this university. It’s inspiring.” Levine believes that “Duquesne is a law school poised to do great things, but one that will do so while maintaining an awareness of the school’s history and commitment to the school’s mission.” Adding to his delight is the small town feel and aesthetic beauty of the city of Pittsburgh, which were a great surprise. “People from out of town don’t realize the beautiful, modern, and vibrant side of Pittsburgh—and Pittsburghers are exceptionally friendly and welcoming.”

Despite his success as a professor and lawyer, it would be unwise to stereotype Levine as a typical straight-laced lawyer. “I explore different ways to connect with students, including using current events, music, and popular culture as the foundation of many assignments. And I guess I have had a well-deserved reputation for using Star Trek as the basis for classroom exercises.”

Levine is married to Doreen Regan, a former elementary school teacher. They have one son, Evan, who attends Georgetown University. Given his impressive track record with writing programs, his strong work ethic, and unwavering dedication, it is clear that the Duquesne University School of Law has found the perfect person to lead its legal research and writing program to new heights. 🍀