

From the Editor: A Time of Change

By James B. Levy

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The past semester has been a time of change, to say the least. As I write this, many of us are entering our third straight month of home lockdown due to the COVID-19 health crisis with all the changes, both large and small, that it has wrought. As professors, we've had to quickly figure out how to transition from our normal face-to-face classroom teaching, to adapting those same lessons online while working from home. When the semester began a few short months ago, few of us had ever heard of Zoom. By now, we've become proficient, if not experts, with it while Zoom has also entered the daily lexicon much like Google did before it. It's been a time of great stress, anxiety, and change for all concerned as we adapt to new health protocols to stay safe in the midst of a pandemic. With time, perhaps we'll look back on this period as a bonding experience that required all of us to learn, adapt, and ultimately become more resilient together. That's what change does.

For the time being, we look toward the fall semester with a mixture of trepidation about the ongoing health crisis and cautious optimism that things will get better. We wish all of our readers, authors, colleagues, students, and everyone else in the legal research and writing community a safe and healthy year ahead. If you're sheltering in place this summer and have any ideas, tips, or advice about how to more effectively transition legal research and writing lessons to an online format, we encourage you to turn those ideas into an article that can be shared with our readers.¹ With the prediction that many law schools will still be holding classes online in

the fall, we can use *Perspectives* to support each other by sharing our online teaching ideas here.

This is also a time of change for *Perspectives*. With this issue, I will be stepping down as EIC and my time on the *Perspectives* board will soon come to an end. I took over as EIC three years ago from Professor Elizabeth Edinger who had done it longer than she had planned and was anxious to have someone relieve her. After I took over, it became abundantly clear that the existing ad hoc method for transitioning from one editor to the next was not a good model for ensuring the continued success of *Perspectives* moving forward. Change was needed.

By way of background, *Perspectives* began life almost 30 years ago in 1992 as the brainchild of Professor Roy Mersky of the University of Texas who wanted to create a published forum in which law librarians and legal writing professors could exchange ideas about the teaching of legal research and writing.² According to *Perspectives*' first EIC, Professor Steven M. Barkan, *Perspectives* was intended to fill a void in the existing scholarship on law school teaching by focusing on the practical, nuts and bolts of legal research and writing pedagogy.³ As such, *Perspectives* quickly became a leading source of invaluable, timely information and advice that professors could take with them right into the classroom. Indeed, many of us pored over each new issue as it came out in our quest to become better, more informed teachers. Keep in mind this was a time before the internet, SSRN didn't yet exist, and conferences devoted to legal research and writing instruction were few and far between. Thus, *Perspectives* played an indispensable role in helping build a discipline

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¹ I am using the term “legal research and writing” in this essay as a catch-all that covers the classroom work done by both law librarians and legal research and writing professors.

² Telephone interview with *Perspectives*' second EIC, Professor Frank G. Houdek, Southern Illinois University School of Law (retired) (Feb. 2019).

³ Steven M. Barkan, *From the Editor: Introducing Perspectives*, 1 PERSPS. 1 (1992).

“... these changes ... will enhance and strengthen *Perspectives* moving forward”

and foster a substantial body of scholarship on legal research and writing pedagogy. In fact, *Perspectives* is the place where most of those who later became leading authorities on the teaching of legal research and writing first published their work.

But as the discipline matured over the decades, became more professionalized, and the volume of scholarship grew in step with those changes, the editorial board of *Perspectives* needed to change too. The board had never adopted bylaws, there was no formal process for inviting new members to join the board, no term limits existed with respect to board membership, nor was there any process in place for ensuring a smooth transition from one “front office” to the next. For example, it was only in the past year that the board created a managing editor position with responsibility for shepherding each new article submission through the editorial process resulting in a greater ability to draw on the collective wisdom of the board to provide constructive feedback and mentorship to prospective authors.⁴

The advisory board managerial model adopted when *Perspectives* first began publishing almost three decades ago no doubt worked well at the time as no one anticipated the changes to come that would transform the discipline of legal research and writing. But as the discipline matured and grew, with many professors now required to publish as part of their jobs, substantially increasing the number of article submissions, one person working part-time nights and weekends could no longer handle all the tasks associated with producing a quality publication twice a year.

It is also sometimes overlooked that *Perspectives* has been underwritten since the beginning by Westlaw, now Thomson Reuters, as an outreach initiative intended to support the legal research and writing community. It no longer served those interests effectively to maintain the old way of doing things when it came to editorial board membership. Thomson Reuters' outreach objectives are much better served by expanding the opportunity to

serve on the editorial board to anyone who is qualified and actively encouraging more applicants who can bring diverse experiences and expertise to the board. Thus, to better advance the original outreach objectives of Thomson Reuters, *Perspectives* was due for a change for that reason as well.

So, with this issue, the Editorial Board is pleased to formally announce that for the first time in *Perspectives*' history, it has adopted bylaws, established term limits on board membership, and created an open application process that allows anyone interested in serving on the board, who also meets the qualifications, to do so. The board adopted these changes in the belief that they will enhance and strengthen *Perspectives* moving forward as a leading forum for publishing and exchanging ideas about the teaching of legal research and writing. These changes will also enhance *Perspectives*' legacy as the most widely read, timely, and relevant publication for those interested in the nuts and bolts of legal research and writing pedagogy. Accordingly, we thank Thomson Reuters for supporting this endeavor over the decades and look forward to its continued support for many years to come.

⁴ Special acknowledgment and thanks goes to Professor Brooke Bowman, *Perspectives*' inaugural Managing Editor, who has established new policies and procedures that greatly enhance the quality and efficiency of the board's work.