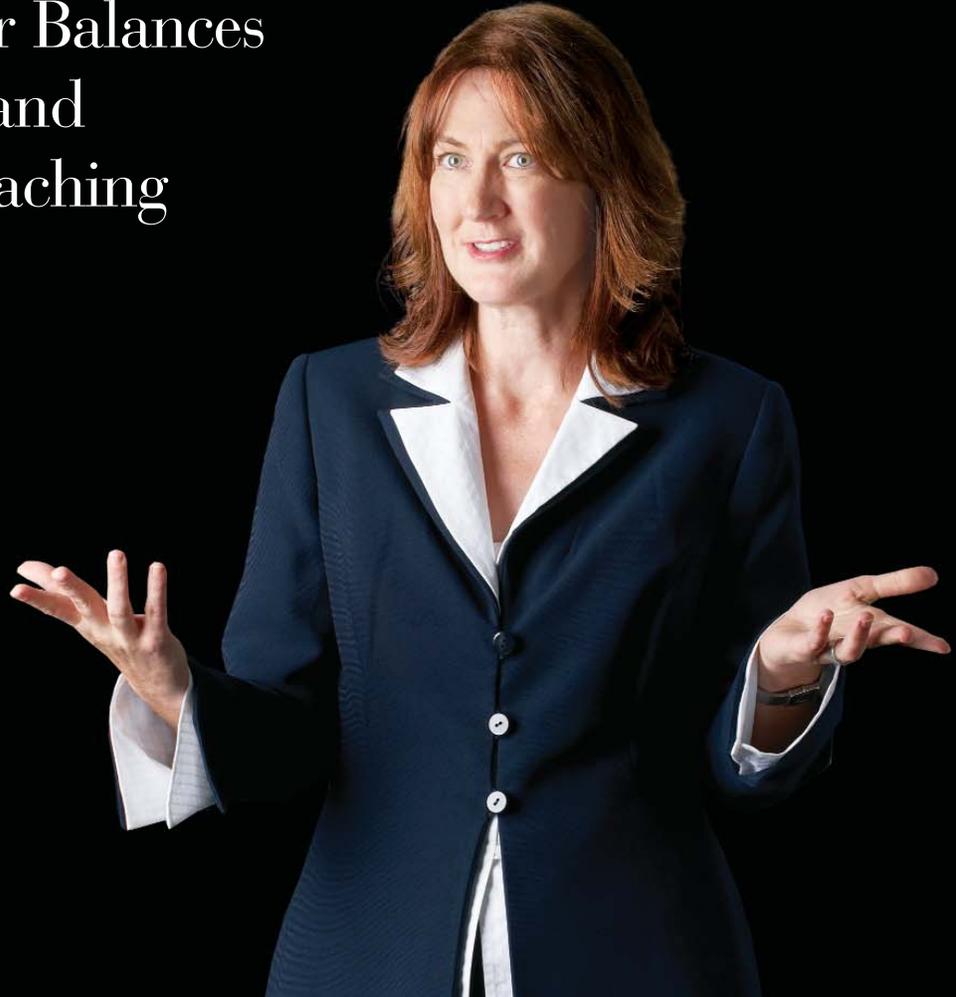


‘The Dooley Effect’

Dedicated Professor Balances
Research Interests and
Commitment to Teaching



It’s not uncommon for a professor to have a lasting impact on a student’s life and career, but it is unusual for that effect to be given a name. The influence that Valparaiso University School of Law Professor Laura Dooley, JD ’86, has on her students has been coined “The Dooley Effect”—so named by former student Marissa Bracke.

“Professor Appleton taught me the importance of being a role model.” LAURA DOOLEY

VALPARAISO PROFESSOR AND WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY LAW ALUMNA LAURA DOOLEY, an expert in the areas of feminist procedure, medical ethics, and habeas corpus, is a firm believer in mentoring and being mentored.

Indiana attorney Marissa Bracke is one of many former students who have received Dooley’s care and guidance. “Professor Dooley asked for my opinions and ideas, and she listened intently when I offered ideas of my own,” Bracke recalls. “If Laura Dooley, a recognized expert in her field, was interested in my analysis of research...well, I must be doing something right! I came to refer to that as ‘The Dooley Effect.’”

Bracke says that as a young associate, she successfully presented her work to a senior partner by remembering her interactions with her esteemed professor.

“I recalled my conversations with Professor Dooley, and I presented my research findings and strategy suggestions to the partner, imagining I was presenting them to Professor Dooley,” says Bracke. “I reassured myself by remembering her words: ‘I believe you can handle this.’”

Another former student, Anne Abrell, says she anticipates that Dooley will be a lifelong mentor: “Laura Dooley is one of those remarkable teachers who can make even the most complex subject matter understandable and who also happens to be a kind, generous friend whose opinions of both the legal world and myself I can rely on.”

AT THE HEART OF the Dooley Effect is Dooley’s longtime commitment to mentoring, drawn in large part from the mentoring she received as a student at Washington University. One of the major influences in her career choice was Susan Appleton, the Lemma Barkeloo & Phoebe Couzins Professor of Law, from whom she took Conflict of Laws and Family Law.

“I was in awe of Professor Appleton. She taught me the importance of being a role model. She had a gift for teaching in a way that made you feel that your ideas matter,” Dooley says. “She also encouraged my intellectual development and challenged me to reach as high as I could.”

Appleton recalls that the would-be law professor impressed her on two levels.

“First, she always understood exactly what I was asking in class, even though the question usually did not have only one answer,” Appleton says. “Second, I found Laura’s level of engagement amazing. She really seemed to love every minute of studying, attending class, and participating in conversations about the law.

“I’m not surprised at all that she has become a terrific teacher and a scholar whose work shows such creativity and insight. I’m

enormously proud to have played a small role along the way.”

Dooley attended the University of Arkansas, receiving degrees in English and piano. The analytical aspects of her English degree combined with the discipline needed to study music would serve her well at Washington University, as she expanded her intellectual pursuits to the study of law.

“I really loved the intellectual side of the law and was thrilled by the idea of being an academic. At Washington University, professors like Susan Appleton, John Drobak, and the late Frank Miller were my mentors. They inspired me to serve as mentors for others.”

After graduating as a member of the Order of the Coif, Dooley clerked for two federal judges—District Judge John Oliver in Kansas City and then Judge Pasco Bowman of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. She joined Valparaiso’s law faculty in 1990 and served as a Swygert Teaching Fellow from 2004–06.

While Dooley has published extensively on a variety of topics, a Christmas visit with her family in 1991 started the work that would first give her national renown. Her brother, Dr. Robert Gaston, a physician who works at the University of Alabama, began to express his concern over the complex, bureaucratic system for determining who receives organ transplants—especially kidneys. In particular, the formula used to determine eligibility led to a shortage of kidneys for African-American patients.

INTRIGUED, DOOLEY DISCUSSED the issue with a friend and Yale economist, Ian Ayres. Together, Dooley, Ayres, and Gaston wrote an article titled “Unequal Racial Access to Kidney Transplantation.” Published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, the paper helped prompt reforms in the allocation system.

“The point was that there were racial inequalities built into the system—not that anyone was trying to be ‘racist,’” Dooley says. “The article proposed a more appropriate ethical and clinical balance to kidney allocation.”

A member of the American Law Institute, her main research interest now is in juries and the composition of juries relative to their power—a phenomenon she has termed “the dilution effect.”

“When juries were made up largely by white men, they had a lot of power. But today, juries are more diverse because there is an effort for them to represent a cross-section of the community. Ironically, that has resulted in weaker juries.”

Recognized for her excellence in teaching and scholarship, Dooley recently was named a Michael and Dianne Swygert Fellow at Valparaiso. In 2007, she received the Jack A. Hiller Distinguished Faculty Award, which recognizes an exceptional teacher, scholar, and role model—someone who imparts The Dooley Effect. ■■■