Session Description : DISCUSSION

Low-Tech Works: Teaching Data, Teaching Justice

Most lawyers and law students do not code or use cutting-edge technologies; many even believe themselves averse to STEM subjects. Yet contemporary law reform depends on finding evidence-based solutions for intractable justice problems. True access to justice (A2J) requires data literacy and an innovation mindset, as well as cognizance of the potential for bias in the use of algorithms and technology. How can law schools bridge this gap between STEM-aversion and the demands of contemporary legal problem solving?

This discussion will grapple with ways to instill law students with an A2J mindset and to act on it. Law teachers have a responsibility, these discussants agree, to teach their students the principles of data- and evidence-based policymaking and to help them imagine and execute informed solutions to justice problems. Those justice problems, of course, include structural racism and inequality.

This group will discuss questions including:

→How can we teach students to find and analyze data that are readily available and easily manipulated? Should schools seek law teachers with greater data expertise? Must we recruit big data gurus to come to law school? Yes. But how shall we reach the rest—the majority--of our students?

→How can we teach students the pitfalls and limitations of data, including foundational issues of inherently imperfect datasets and risks of data manipulation? How do we explore the impact of systemic biases upon data? And how do we uncover our own biases in our approaches to justice problems?

→How do we create courses—or course modules—that use technology-for-justice tools that can be deployed even by students with little technology training?

→What settings might help students learn practical data skills, using real data? Could quasi-clinical class settings be used to connect students with entities like courts, which might have data that could be shared with students and used for learning and potential reform? What other methods could be used to give students real data experience and expertise?

The organizers of this discussion group have differing levels of proficiency, practice experiences, and approaches to data science, legal technology, and computer programming. We have taught in a range of institutions, including a 120-year-old free-standing school with the first accredited on-line program in the United States, and law schools committed to students who work while attending school. We differ in the roles we occupy at our schools, from full professor with tenure to adjunct professor to clinical fellow with little or no job security, and we have varying roles in integrating A2J skills into our law school curricula. We hope these varied backgrounds and perspectives will help us find creative ways to influence curricular offerings and expand student data skills.