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Enriching Student Understanding of Trial Courts through Service Learning

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Abstract

This article describes a service learning program developed through a partnership between John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the New York Office of Court Administration and a New York court reform organization under which John Jay College students serve as court monitors of local criminal courts, and judges and court administrators come to the classroom as guest speakers. The program enriches students' understanding of the courts beyond academic descriptions of judicial processes and increases their sense of civic responsibility. From the courts' perspective the program serves as an important judicial outreach initiative to increase public confidence in their operation. Beyond addressing the program and the students' reaction to it, the article provides guidance for replicating the program in other communities.

Notes

1. For more information about the Fund for Modern Courts, including press releases and copies of court monitoring reports, go to the Fund's website: <http://www.moderncourts.org>. For information on another court monitoring organization, the Council for Court Excellence, in Washington, DC, see its website at <http://www.courtexcellence.org>
2. The first year the course was taught, the students monitored judges in Manhattan Supreme Court, Criminal Term, which is the trial court of general jurisdiction. In subsequent years, students have monitored New York City Criminal Court, a limited jurisdiction court in.
3. The professors modified their courses slightly to take advantage of the expertise of certain speakers. For example, they addressed court specialization in more detail before a talk by a judge who oversees a court for youthful offenders. Other judges were willing to speak on topics that are already part of the courses, such as judicial selection.
4. In its Annual Report for [2000](#), Modern Courts highlighted the program with John Jay College, calling it a “resounding success” (Fund for Modern Courts [2000](#):7).

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