

## EVALUATION OF THE GEORGETOWN LAW CENTER “STREET LAW” COURSE IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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### KEY MESSAGES:

- Practical legal instruction and highly participatory teaching strategies have the power to boost students' knowledge of key civics concepts and civic participation skills.
- Street Law is a course that teaches practical law to young people, empowering them to become better thinkers and citizens. This brief summarizes the components of one such program, led by Georgetown University Law Center, and results from its evaluation.

### Introduction

Street Law began in 1972 when a small group of Georgetown University Law Center students developed an experimental curriculum to teach District of Columbia high school students about law and the legal system. The course focused on legal information that everyday people should know, was taught by law students, and used interactive and student-centered instruction strategies. Because of its practical nature, the course was called "Street Law."

Over the years, Street Law expanded its model to other law schools, pioneering the concept of credit-bearing law student teaching programs. Today, Street Law programs can be found at more than 70 law schools in the U.S. and over 50 more around the world. Street Law, Inc. was incorporated as a non-profit organization to expand this type of program to new audiences and locations. It also offers curricula for use by high school teachers, professional development for teachers, and a variety of programs that bring legal professionals—attorneys, judges, police officers, and others—into classrooms.

#### Box 1: District of Columbia Education Series Primer

**Why a series of briefs on innovations in education in the District of Columbia?** While much of the work of the Education Practice at the World Bank focuses on low and middle income countries, insights from innovations in OECD countries can also be highly valuable when thinking about education policy. This series focuses on innovative programs in Washington, DC.

**What are the topics discussed in the series?** The series looks at a number of innovative programs related among others to the curriculum, student learning, tutoring, and skills for the labor market. Private provision through charter schools is also discussed. Many of the programs have received support from the World Bank Community Connections or individual Bank staff.

**What is the question asked in this brief?** The question is: How can Street Law programs influence the development of legal knowledge and civic skills in participants?

**How is the question answered?** Street Law programs provide practical legal instruction and highly participatory teaching strategies, which have the power to boost students' knowledge of key civics concepts and civic participation skills.

The original Street Law program at Georgetown University Law Center is still active today, connecting law students and attorneys from local law firms with high schools to teach young people about the law. That program is run by professors and staff at Georgetown Law Center, and operates as a clinic within the law school. This brief summarizes Georgetown's Street Law activities and shares results from an evaluation of the program by former leader Seán Arthurs. The evaluation shows that the high school students' performance on a test of course-related content improved after the program.

### The Street Law Philosophy

Street Law classes have been delivered to young people with positive feedback since 1972, reaching millions of students across all fifty states and around the globe. Street Law courses aim to improve knowledge of the law and build participants' civic skills. This includes analyzing issues, considering multiple points of view, advocating for a position, collaborating, and finding consensus. Street Law courses use a democratic and interactive approach, emphasizing discussion, deliberation, and student interaction as primary learning strategies. This innovative teaching methodology exemplifies best practices in learner-centered education and demonstrates the effectiveness of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools' "six proven practices" in civic education.<sup>1</sup>

The typical law-school based Street Law program—where law students teach in high schools—takes place over the course of a semester and focuses on practical legal content, including civil, criminal, and constitutional law. This brief outlines the components of the Georgetown Street Law Clinic, which lasts for a full year. The first part of the course is designed to provide background knowledge about the legal system and constitutional principles. It includes units on:

- The basis for law as an integral component of the social order;
- Criminal law, including the types of punishments suited to particular crimes;
- Criminal procedure, including protections afforded by the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments;
- Individual rights afforded by the Constitution, with an in-depth focus on the First and Second Amendments;
- An introduction to international human rights laws and the DC Human Rights Act, and;
- Other legal topics (depending on student interest), including family law, torts, employment law, housing law, and consumer law.<sup>2</sup>

A typical example of a Street Law class in the first half of the curriculum is an activity called "Aliens." The lesson is premised upon the rise of "alien overlords" who are willing to let students retain only a small number of the fundamental rights afforded to them by the U.S. Constitution. Within small groups, students deliberate to reach a consensus about the fundamental rights they wish to relinquish, and those they wish to keep. As the overlords become more demanding, the student groups must eventually decide on the three rights they view as most fundamental. Each group must then justify their selection and attempt to reach a class-wide consensus on the most critical fundamental rights. Through this activity, students are able to synthesize information they have learned about their fundamental rights, negotiate and build consensus amongst their peers, and think critically about the importance and relevance of different rights within a democratic society.

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The second half of the Georgetown Street Law course is spent preparing for a mock trial experience. Students:

- Explore a hypothetical case context that is designed to appeal to their interests;
- Assume the roles of attorney, party, and witness for both the plaintiff and the defendant;
- Learn to make evidence- and precedent-based claims that support their case, and;
- Bring the case to "trial" at the D.C. Superior Court. This mock trial is adjudicated by Superior Court judges and local attorneys.

During the mock trial portion of the curriculum, students are required to evaluate a 100-page packet of case materials, evidence, and precedent in order to take a stand and articulate the merits and weaknesses of their position. At the final "trial," they learn how to defend their positions while thinking on their feet and observing the conventions of the courtroom.

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<sup>1</sup> Gould, J., editor, 2011, *Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools.*

<sup>2</sup> Arthurs, S. 2016, *Street Law: Creating Tomorrow's Citizens Today*, Portland, OR: Lewis and Clark Law Review.

**Box 2: Street Law around the Globe**

Street Law, Inc., the nonprofit organization spearheading the expansion of the Street Law model, has launched programs in over 40 countries since 1972. The organization has worked with youths, law students, and community leaders to create and adapt Street Law curricula to fit the needs of young people across the world. In the past decade, Street Law programs have been especially active in Belarus, Ecuador, Indonesia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, South Africa, Tunisia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> One of Street Law, Inc.'s most powerful international projects has been the development of a text called *Democracy for All*. That text was used in South Africa in a civic education program across the country and was translated and adapted for use in several other countries. An evaluation of that program showed that the type of participatory teaching methods Street Law used resulted in stronger civic skills, democratic values, and positive attitudes about civic participation.<sup>4</sup>

**Evaluation of Street Law Program in DC**

During 2013-14, staff from the Georgetown University Law School Street Law Clinic designed and administered two tests to all high school students taking the Georgetown Street Law course in Washington, DC. The first test, in early September, was a “pre-test” designed to assess students’ working knowledge of law and government prior to their exposure to Street Law. The second test, conducted in early May, was a “post-test” that asked identical questions and assessed students’ growth. A total of 97 students (mostly in their junior or senior year of high school) across 12 public high schools in the District of Columbia took both the pre-test and the post-test (hundreds more participate in the Street Law courses but did not take one, or both, tests).

Staff from the Georgetown University Law School Street Law Clinic designed and administered two tests to all high school students taking the course in Washington, DC: a pre-test before the course and a post-test after the course.

Self-selection may have been at work in terms of which students and schools participated in the program, so that the results of the evaluation must be considered with caution in that they are not necessarily representative of the gains that would be achieved among randomly selected students and schools. Still, the results are instructive.

The tests consisted of 20 multiple choice questions—17 of which were taken directly from prior National Assessment of Education Progress assessments aimed at gauging students’ civic knowledge. The second part of the test was a series of three constructed response questions designed to assess students’ civics- and law-related critical thinking skills. The three questions invited students to:

- A. Pick one law that they would like to re-write and give a justification for doing so;
- B. List the reasons that a school-uniform policy is both a good and bad idea, and;
- C. Evaluate a hypothetical scenario involving student suspensions and inappropriate websites and determine whether the suspended student’s rights were violated.

Law student graders scored multiple choice questions as either correct or incorrect and assigned each constructed response question a score ranging from level 0 to level 4, depending on the knowledge, integration, and comprehensiveness displayed by the student’s response.

Table 1 shows students’ performance on different aspects of the pre- and post-tests. The table shows the percentage of correct answers on the multiple choice questions and the students’ graded (on a 0-4 scale) answers on each of the three constructed response questions.

**Table 1: Student Scores on Pre- and Post-Tests**

	Pre-test	Post-test	P-value
Multiple Choice	48.80%	59.90%	<0.001
Essay A	1.39	2.32	<0.001
Essay B	2.39	3.12	<0.001
Essay C	1.33	2.30	<0.001

Source: Arthurs, S., 2016, *Street Law: Creating Tomorrow’s Citizens Today*, Portland, OR: Lewis and Clark Law Review.

Students scored 11.1 percentage points higher on the 20 multiple choice questions in the post-test. Students also scored higher on all three of the constructed response questions. All of these gains were statistically significant.

Students scored significantly higher on multiple choice and constructed response questions after completing the Georgetown University-coordinated Street Law course. These questions were designed to test civic knowledge and have students articulate their opinions, consider multiple viewpoints on an issue, and form conclusions based upon evaluations of facts and evidence.

<sup>3</sup> Street Law Inc., 2016, Program Locations.

<sup>4</sup> Finkel, S. E. and H. R. Ernst, 2005, *Civic Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Alternative Paths to the Development of Political Knowledge and Democratic Values*.

The three constructed response questions were designed to have students articulate their opinions, consider multiple viewpoints on an issue, and form conclusions based upon evaluations of facts and evidence. The Street Law curriculum prioritizes precisely these critical thinking skills. Classroom activities prompt students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate critical components of practical law. The increased scores in students' responses to these questions suggest that the curriculum does have a positive impact in terms of improving their abilities in these areas.

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*Authors Lee Arbetman and Ben Steele are with Street Law, Inc. This series of briefs was launched as a collaborative effort between the Education Practice at the World Bank, the Community Outreach Program at the World Bank, and the Rotary Club of Capitol Hill. Please contact Quentin Wodon at [qwodon@worldbank.org](mailto:qwodon@worldbank.org) for information. The brief series is part of the SABER Equity and Inclusion program that benefitted from the support of the Global Partnership for Education. The opinions expressed in this brief are those of the authors only. They may not represent the views of the World Bank, its Executive Directors, or the countries they represent, nor those of DC public schools or other partners in this evaluation.*

### **Box 3: Street Law Outside of the Classroom**

Since Street Law's inception, programs have existed outside traditional classrooms. Street Law programs take place in prisons, in juvenile justice settings, and at community sites for teen parents and for youth transitioning out of foster care. An assessment of the Save Our Streets program (a program for youths being adjudicated in Washington, DC, mainly for minor weapons offenses), conducted by Street Law Inc. and Caliber Associates, showed positive results in students' knowledge, skills, and a reduction in recidivism. Participating youths scored significantly better after the program on a test of their knowledge of key legal concepts, and demonstrated a significantly improved ability to resolve conflicts and to generate and evaluate solutions to problems. In addition, youths who completed the program had re-arrest rates for delinquent offenses and weapons charges that were 93 percent lower than students who did not complete the program.<sup>5</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This brief has provided an overview of the Georgetown Law Center Street Law program in Washington, DC public high schools. Assessments given to 97 students before and after the program suggest that the students improved their knowledge about key civics concepts and ability to answer critical thinking questions after the Street Law course. Students experienced statistically significant increases in their performance on both multiple-choice questions and long-response questions from the pre- to post-tests.

Street Law programs are focused on skill-building activities and practical information. Empowering young people with this interactive, practical, and effective civic education yields skills and knowledge that prepare students to become invested and active citizens.

This form of effective civic education combats Americans' increasingly troublesome civic illiteracy and disengagement from civic life. If the legitimacy of a democratic system is dependent upon the civic knowledge of its citizenry, programs such as Street Law's course for high school students could be one component of a well-functioning democracy in the United States and abroad.

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<sup>5</sup> Street Law Inc., 2016, Program Evaluations and Summaries.