

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

The Marvin and Virginia Schmid Law Library

Law, College of

---

2015

## Mentoring Is Learning

Richard Leiter

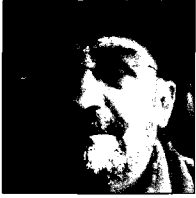
Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/lawlibrary>



Part of the [Law Commons](#), and the [Law Librarianship Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law, College of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Marvin and Virginia Schmid Law Library by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.



## MENTORING IS LEARNING

BY RICHARD LEITER

One of the most rewarding things about growing old is the wisdom that comes with it. Individually, we may deny that as we grow older we automatically or necessarily become wiser. In fact most of us, if we are honest with ourselves, will deny this, but I'm convinced that this is merely humility. As we grow older, we become more aware of our foibles and the knowledge that everyone is flawed and falls short of the glory of God. This kind of self-awareness is the source of our humility: understood appropriately, it is also the source of our wisdom.

Many of us who are called to teaching also find a deep concern and love for youth, which we express in the form of what I can only call caring nurturing. Teaching upcoming lawyers about the nature and nuance of our work is the way that wisdom is passed along from generation to generation. As corny as it sounds, it is the cycle of life; it is how the next generation builds upon the experience of the previous one and grows stronger, deeper, and more solid. This process helps us build upon the wisdom of the past to develop stronger, more competent lawyers.

As we grow in experience and learning, we develop wisdom as we face new situations that either support our ideas, plans or actions, or challenge them. Passing along such wisdom to law students and young lawyers either equips them to avoid the pitfalls that we encounter or encourages them to grow stronger and try new ways to defeat or overcome them. Over the years, as an advisor to our local CLS chapter, I've found that there is a strong need among law students for a safe haven where they can learn these lessons and develop their confidence as minority members of a the learning community of law schools. CLS provides this sort of safe haven where students can discuss the challenges that they encounter

Many times throughout their law school careers, law students of faith are challenged about their beliefs, and

sometimes those challenges are strong enough that they may doubt or question their presuppositions about the law and what it means to be a Christian lawyer. The most meaningful thing to me about CLS is the opportunity it provides me to meet students in a safe place, whether it's a weekly Bible study at school, a social gathering at my home, or a lunchtime program open to the entire law school community featuring a special speaker. These are opportunities for students to exercise their faith without fear of threat, attack, or most likely, veiled condescension. It is important for students to have a safe space where they can say things that might be contrary to the prevailing wisdom or seen as "fanatical" or, worse, faith-based (read: "unreasonable"). Many students have no safe place, other than their own homes, where they are free to be who they are as Christians without feeling like an odd man — or woman — out. It is a privilege for me to be a part of that safe place

Each year I tell my student officers of CLS that perhaps the most important aspect of the student chapter of CLS happens at the beginning of the year at the BBQ that I host. If nothing else, the students get familiar with the faces of other Christians among the student body, they know that they are not alone at law school. When they pass each other in the halls they will recognize other Christians and know that they are not alone.

As the faculty advisor of CLS, I enjoy interacting with the students in any setting. I like being with younger people and hearing about their desires, their ambitions, their idealism, and their perspective on today's increasingly secular world. I have generally found that CLS members are more eager to give me the benefit of the doubt and even appear eager to get the perspective of the "elder" in their midst. It is at this nexus that the magic happens. I find that sometimes, when I weigh in on a topic, while I'm given some deference, I'm also called out when my ideas have become old-fashioned.

CLS chapter functions, as distinguished from classes or office meetings, provide a setting where we are all on a common level; we are all Christians, on the same journey of discerning how to live as Christians in an increasingly secular and hostile world. I am learning to learn from the students and learning when to teach and guide them.

Presuppositions long held or taken for granted in the Christian community are being fundamentally challenged, and not only by secular governmental or judicial action, but by members of our own communities. What were once solidly held political or legal or biblical beliefs are now questioned by the younger generations. As I engage my students about issues such as homosexuality or marriage, I'm finding myself on the defensive, having to justify positions that I once had taken for granted.

In these cases, I find it refreshing to be challenged by younger brothers and sisters who are committed to the same God that I am, but who, having grown up in different decades than me, have developed different ideas. It makes me wonder sometimes about my own beliefs and whether my background has led me into presuppositions that are not as true as I have grown to believe. After all, in my own youth, there were adults who were

claiming that rock 'n' roll was leading youth directly to hell! Might some of my current beliefs be equivalent to those of the older generation of my day?

Why do I love teaching and working with my student chapters of the Christian Legal Society? I love mentoring the younger generation, and I love being mentored by them, too.

---

*Richard Leiter is the law library director and professor of law at the University of Nebraska College of Law. He's been at Nebraska for around fifteen years. Prior to moving to the heartland, he spent six years in a similar position at Howard University School of Law and three years at Regent University School of Law. Prior to becoming a director, Richard worked at the University of Texas Tarlton Law Library and several law firms on the west coast. He is originally from Northern California where he spent his youth listening to and collecting what is now considered classic rock 'n' roll and surfing in the frigid water around Santa Cruz. Richard is married and has three adult daughters and two (and a half) grandchildren. His undergraduate degree is from UC Santa Cruz, law degree from Southwestern University Law School and his MLIS is from the University of Texas School of Information Science.*