

John F. Murphy

Instructional Professor of Law | Director of Academic Support & Bar Passage

Texas A&M University School of Law

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TEACHING CV

EDUCATION

Doctor of Jurisprudence, with honors The University of Texas at Austin	1993
Bachelor of Arts (History) The University of Texas at Austin	1989

TEACHING INTERESTS

Legal analysis and writing; leveraging technology to enhance learning in and out of the classroom; developing data-driven and science-based programs to enhance student outcomes, especially on the bar exam; appellate advocacy.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS & PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Director, Academic Support & Bar Passage Texas A&M School of Law	2019– present
Instructional Professor of Law Texas A&M School of Law	2021– present
Associate Instructional Professor of Law Texas A&M School of Law	2013– 2021
Associate Professor of Law Texas Wesleyan School of Law	2009– 2013
Adjunct Professor of Law Texas Wesleyan School of Law	2006–2009; 2000–2001
Senior Staff Attorney Court of Appeals for the Second District of Texas	2005– 2009
Partner Gardner, Aldrich & Murphy, LLP	1996– 2005
Associate Camp & Warren, LLP	1993– 1996

RELEVANT SERVICE

Director of Academic Support & Bar Passage

In addition to teaching a full load of classes, I have served as the director of the law school's academic-support program since May 2019. The mission of the academic support program is to help all students achieve their highest potential in law school and pass the bar exam on the first attempt. In practical terms, this means teaching learning skills and exam strategies to students in all three years of the juris-doctor program. First-year students attend weekly, mandatory small-group academic support sessions led by second- and third-year teaching assistants. With the help of the assistant director, I develop the curriculum and lesson plans for the TAs, and I train the TAs to deliver the lessons. Participation in academic support is optional for upper-level students except for those on academic probation.

2019–
present

Since I became the director in May 2019, I have focused our academic support on science-based teaching and learning techniques. One measure of the program's success under my directorship is the fact that no first-year students were dismissed for failing to maintain the minimum-required GPA after the fall 2020 semester—the first time this has ever happened in the law school's history.

Chair, Assessment & Bar Passage Committee

The Assessment Committee oversees the law school's efforts to ensure that our graduates are thoroughly prepared for taking the bar examination upon graduation. In addition, the Committee provides input and assistance to the Director of Academic Support. The Committee also assists the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in implementing and monitoring an effective program of assessment at the Law School. The Committee is responsible for ensuring compliance with SACS and ABA requirements and generating reports for those accrediting bodies.

2019–
present

TEACHING PRACTICE

Preparing for the Bar Exam

Preparing for the Bar Exam is an early on-ramp to the intensive bar-exam preparation that follows graduation. It is required in the final semester of law school for students in the bottom third of the class. The course reviews doctrinal law on heavily bar-tested topics, reinforces the time-pressured writing skills the exam requires, and teaches science-based exam and study strategies. Enrollment is sixty or more students in the spring semester (few students graduate in December, so the fall section is much smaller).

Fall 2019–
present
(every
semester)

Legal Analysis, Research & Writing I

LARW I is a first-semester course that serves as the foundation for everything students will learn in law school. As the name suggests, it covers logic and legal

Fall 2009–
Fall 2020

reasoning, basic legal research, and the highly precise and technical writing required of lawyers. Enrollment ranges from eighteen to twenty-five students per semester. The course is writing-intensive; students in my section complete as many as twelve writing projects in a twelve-week semester.

Legal Analysis, Research & Writing II

LARW II is the second-semester continuation of LARW I. Students learn advanced research techniques, persuasive legal writing, and the fundamentals of oral argument. Enrollment ranges from eighteen to twenty-five students.

Spring
2010–
Spring
2021

The Art of Lawyering

The Art of Lawyering was a course I developed to improve law-school learning outcomes for students who struggled in the first year of law school. It was required for the students in the bottom quarter of the class. The course focused on legal analysis and served as a laboratory where I developed techniques for breaking legal analysis into baby steps and building blocks. Some of those techniques—like the “Big T” method for graphically analyzing a legal problem—are now in widespread use at TAMU Law, other law schools, and commercial bar-exam-prep companies. The course had a significant impact on student GPAs; students averaged a .25-point increase in their cumulative GPAs after completing the course, and many leapfrogged their peers who did not take the course. Eventually, the tools and techniques I developed in this course were incorporated into the first-year Academic Support program so that all students would benefit from them earlier in their law-school careers. Enrollment ranged from eight to thirty students, depending on the size of the cohort and the number of sections offered in a given semester.

Fall 2011–
Fall 2018

Appellate Advocacy

Appellate Advocacy focuses on the area of law that was my passion when I worked in private and state practice—written and oral argument in the courts of appeal. I started teaching this course as an adjunct. Enrollment ranged from six to over thirty students per semester.

Spring
2016 & Fall
2006–
Fall 2008

TEACHING IMPACT

Bar-exam pass rate

Objective measures of teaching impact are rare in law schools. But the bar exam is one such measure. TAMU Law Dean Robert Ahdieh appointed me to serve as Director of Academic Support in May 2019—at the beginning of the prep season for the July 2019 bar exam. I immediately implemented new programs and policies, including the widespread adoption of previously underutilized bar-prep tools and a comprehensive mentoring program for all students, with at-risk students receiving intensive, weekly, one-on-one mentoring. Our Texas bar-pass rate for first-time examinees rose from 88% in July 2018 to 92.5% in July 2019.

I employed the same strategies for the July 2020 exam (which was postponed

until September and October), this time recruiting and training more mentors to expand the scope of the one-on-one mentoring program and developing additional science-based learning techniques for our students' use. I used exhaustive data from the three prior graduating classes to predict who in the class of 2020 would struggle on the exam and used that prediction to allocate resources to bar preppers. Despite the anxiety and uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, our first-time pass rate for the September/October Texas exams rose to 92.59%—our highest pass rate ever, and the highest pass rate in the state on those exams. In addition to our unprecedented pass rate in Texas, thirty-five TAMU Law first-time examinees took bar exams in other states. All thirty-five passed those exams.

In July 2021, our graduates achieved another all-time high pass rate: 93.33%. And this was in a year when most other Texas law schools—including SMU, Baylor, and Texas Tech—saw significant declines in their pass rates. And in February 2022, our first-time Texas pass rate rose to 100% (though the sample size was small—just four students).

The credit for our unprecedented bar-exam success over the past three years lies first with our amazing students and second with our dedicated faculty. But perhaps a little of the credit lies with my department and the programming I developed since becoming its director.

Student evaluations

Following are quotations from student evaluations of my teaching:

- Murphy is one of the best, if not the best professor I have had in my educational career.
- He constantly engages the students and promotes continuous critical thinking.
- I will use all the information I was taught in this class in my legal career. Professor Murphy is a wonderful coach and motivator.
- I cannot think of a single thing that I did not enjoy about this class. Professor Murphy not only motivated me to do well in this class but in all of my other classes as well.
- The class was extremely effective. Even on days when the subject matter was unbearable, he found a way to present the information so I could be stimulated and learn.
- I liked his difficult grading because it motivated me to do better than before.

Peer evaluations

Following are quotations from peer evaluations of my teaching:

- John Murphy is an exceptional teacher. Professor Murphy's technological

expertise was readily apparent and raises the bar for our entire faculty. I cannot possibly list all the superlatives that his teaching deserves.

- The class was lively paced, with many different activities designed to keep the students’ attention and to have them learn in different ways. He had a very good rapport with the class. He was well organized and he used technology in a most effective and engaging way. I found this to be a highly effective—and excellent—class. John Murphy is the kind of teacher who makes a difference in students’ lives.

RECOGNITION FOR TEACHING

Winner, Texas A&M Provost Academic Professional Track Faculty Teaching Excellence Award (university-wide)	2021
Winner, Adair “New Advisor” Award for student-organization advisors (university-wide)	2021
Winner, Texas A&M DOF-AFS Distinguished Achievement Award for Teaching (university-wide)	2019
Winner, Texas A&M School of Law Legal Analysis & Writing Professor of the Year	2013, 2016, 2017, 2018
Winner, Texas Wesleyan School of Law Legal Analysis & Writing Professor of the Year	2011, 2012
Nominee, Texas A&M DOF-AFS Distinguished Achievement Award for Teaching	2016, 2018
Nominee, Texas A&M DOF-AFS Distinguished Achievement Award for Graduate Mentoring	2017
Nominee, Texas A&M Presidential Professor of Teaching Excellence	2016, 2021, 2022

RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP & PRESENTATIONS RELATED TO TEACHING

<i>Bar Prep: Navigating an Ever-changing Landscape</i> Associate Deans’ Conference, Texas A&M School of Law	June 2020
<i>Teaching Remedial Analysis: The Big T</i> Legal Writing Institute Biennial Conference, Portland, Oregon	July 2016
<i>Collaborative Writing with Google Docs</i> 12th Annual Teaching with Technology Conference, Texas A&M University	March 2016

Teaching Remedial Problem-Solving Skills to Underperforming Law Students 16 Nev. L. J. 173 (2015) (available at https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/nlj/vol16/iss1/7/)	May 2015
Developing a Targeted Class to Improve Academic Performance and Bar Passage Southwest Consortium of Academic Support Professionals Annual Conference, Texas A&M School of Law	March 2015
What LARW Professors Can Learn from Teaching Underperforming Students Legal Writing Institute One-Day Workshop, University of Detroit—Mercy School of Law	December 2015
Bottom Up: Teaching Remedial Problem-Solving Skills to Underperforming Law Students SALT Teaching Conference, University of Las Vegas School of Law	October 2014
YouTube Pedagogy: A Practical Guide Institute for Law Teaching & Learning, New York Law School Legal Writing Institute Southeast Regional Conference, Mercer School of Law Texas Wesleyan University Summer Teaching Institute	June 2011 April 2011 Feb. 2011

OTHER ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING

TAMU Law Toastmasters/TAMU Law Speakers' Bureau

In 2014, I became frustrated with our students' poorly developed public-speaking skills—and the lack of opportunities for them to hone those skills in law school. I therefore chartered a chapter of Toastmasters—an international public-speaking and leadership-skills club—on the TAMU Law campus. The club was an immediate success. Students practice their speaking skills in a low-stakes, supportive environment that encourages growth and experimentation. For a few years, we were the only law school in the nation with its own Toastmasters club; other schools have since created their own clubs.

In 2019, at my urging, the club voted to rebrand itself as the TAMU Law Speakers' Bureau and develop its own programming that is a better fit for the kinds of public speaking lawyers do, whether in the courtroom or the community. Despite the proscription on in-person meetings due to Covid-19, the club remains strong and vibrant in its Zoom incarnation. I continue to serve as the club's faculty advisor.

Instructional & Promotional Videos

In 2015–2016, I produced a series of videos for the law school. The videos served two purposes: Introduce students to the fundamentals of legal reasoning and promote the law school to prospective students. The videos are posted on YouTube. The first video in the series—*Thinking Like a Lawyer*—has garnered over 298,000 views. [Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0L5d2RAWyZs>] The

other videos—a series named *Ten Minutes Toward Mastery*—have been used in our MJur and LLM programs. [Link to playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLaZeYSuYzKI-DZEW-bKg71RPHN8Caq09B>]