



Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching Law and Communication

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ABSTRACT

As the boundaries between disciplines continue to blur in a rapidly evolving educational and professional landscape, integrating legal and communication studies has become increasingly relevant. This paper investigates the interdisciplinary teaching of law and communication, emphasizing pedagogical strategies, curriculum development, theoretical frameworks, and institutional challenges. It investigates how collaboration between legal scholars and communication specialists can foster comprehensive, critical, and culturally nuanced learning experiences. Drawing from historical perspectives, empirical case studies, and reflective teaching models, the study demonstrates how team teaching, role-play, Socratic inquiry, and experiential assessment can cultivate students' analytical and ethical competencies. Challenges in institutional integration, curriculum planning, and faculty coordination are examined alongside best practices and successful interdisciplinary programs. The findings advocate for sustained institutional support, faculty training, and adaptive curricula to nurture interdisciplinary learning and prepare students for complex societal roles.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary Teaching, Legal Communication, Curriculum Development, Pedagogical Strategies, Team Teaching, Mass Communication Law.

INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinary approaches to education have gained traction lately, focusing on both pedagogical methods and institutional actions that either promote or hinder such work. These actions include hiring faculty with legal and non-legal advanced degrees, forming cross-departmental committees for course development, and crafting mission statements advocating for interdisciplinary curricula and teaching initiatives. However, these efforts often fall short. Effective administration in law schools can facilitate interdisciplinary education, but currently, few initiatives exist. One promising method is team teaching. Expanding team teaching to include law professors collaborating with faculty from other disciplines—such as sociology, psychology, and healthcare—can greatly enhance students' educational experience. Such courses would allow students to venture beyond traditional law classrooms and engage with other disciplines, providing a richer understanding of various methodologies and mindsets. By participating in interdisciplinary courses, students would need to assimilate new perspectives and communication styles, which would challenge their traditional legal education and foster comprehensive learning [1, 2].

The Intersection of Law and Communication

Due to the pervasive nature of communication today, legal and ethical issues related to its use have gained increased importance. Traditional censorship concerns like libel and obscenity persist, but rapid technological changes are creating new offenses and issues. For the public to engage meaningfully in discussions about the roles of press and broadcasting, knowledge of rights, privileges, and responsibilities is essential. It's critical to avoid leaving individuals using mass communication technology without legal understanding. As communication methods evolve, there's greater opportunity for public involvement in determining their roles, necessitating a foundational knowledge of the legal and ethical dimensions of communication. The laws governing the dissemination of material to large audiences are complex, with varied conditions affecting what can appropriately be published or broadcasted. There is no blanket immunity from legal action for using mass communication, and inappropriate use can lead to lawsuits or prosecution. The current era highlights the importance of communication analysis, as control over communication channels is being debated by a public unable to create its own communication models.

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While communication freedoms have expanded, concerns have emerged—newspapers are acquiring printing presses, radio owners are purchasing television stations, and public access to media is being restricted by prohibitive fees. Such trends risk consolidating control over the exchange of ideas within a wealthy elite unless laws and standards are reformed to prevent abuses [3, 4].

Historical Perspectives on Law and Communication

Communication and law are integral to modern society, creating challenges and opportunities for journalism, mass media, telecommunications, and information dissemination. The intersection of these fields continues to attract interest from scholars and practitioners. A lack of understanding of legal realities can result in poor communicative conduct, avoidance of legal frameworks, and suppression of viewpoints for control. Despite these issues, many communication disciplines introduce students to law and communication topics within professional practices. To bridge disciplinary gaps, effective pedagogical methods, such as aided case study, blended learning, role-play simulation, formal debate, and interdisciplinary strategies, should be used. These approaches facilitate discrete yet connected disciplinary cultures, enhancing engagements across fields. This research surveys teaching methods for law and communication, aimed at assisting both experienced and novice educators. It explores pedagogical nuances essential for teaching law and communication effectively, addressing cultural and contextual discontinuities. Understanding the development of pedagogical methods is crucial, so historical perspectives on law, communication, and their intersection are discussed. Empirical evidence from an adaptive case study highlights the use of role-play simulations in teaching these subjects. The study reflects on pedagogical scholarship across law and communication, clarifying that 'law and communication' refers to a specific disciplinary sphere without implying preference. The aim is to highlight overarching considerations that apply across disciplines rather than treating them in isolation [5, 6].

Theoretical Frameworks

Although law and communication are traditionally taught as separate disciplines, a pedagogical model has been developed that can be successfully implemented in an undergraduate course that integrates both disciplines. The model has already been successfully used at different institutions, along with variations created by other instructors. A discussion of the framework, its success in the teaching/learning process, and suggestions for implementation is provided. The two fields of law and mass communication, in which the teaching and creation of knowledge are the primary activities, have many commonalities. Each is taught in a plethora of departments and schools in colleges and universities; several organizations exist that promote each field and provide a forum for the dissemination of research and teaching information; there is an established body of knowledge and respected scholars in each; respected journals are published in each field. Despite these similarities, however, an examination of the literature in each field indicates that they are politically and pedagogically viewed quite differently. Respect for and in-depth knowledge of the companion discipline is relatively rare. The absence of interdisciplinary research in mass communication law is a foregone conclusion. Polls of law school and journalism school educators regarding communication law education identify pedagogical similarities, but pedagogically innovative approaches that could serve as models for bipartisan courses are absent from the literature. The object of this analysis is to present a way in which law and communication can be taught together (or at least complementarily) in an undergraduate course. A specific state-mandated curriculum is used in order to create context for the proposed model. Analysis is limited to mass communication law, as opposed to broader law topics; the latter would be unmanageable and foreign to most communication specialists. Further, the intended audience for this discussion is neither labor lawyers nor environmental law scholars; it is teaching communication specialists who want to teach law but who have had little or no law education. Mass communication law beliefs and teaching experiences that most communication educators already possess, but of which they may not consciously be aware, are identified. The conception is that with the use of these existing knowledge and beliefs, the presentation of law as an approachable and understandable discipline can be taught. The destructive political divide between the two fields can also begin to be addressed [7, 8].

Curriculum Development

Introduction Courses that provide an overview of the world of mass communication law are taught on many universities and colleges. Such courses usually attend to the historical development of the law, its interpretation and application, and the related ethical and philosophical issues. However, primary instruction modes used in these courses can range from lecture and discussion, to interactive modes like debate and moot court. The United States Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Antonin Scalia would be pleased. They would find this innovative approach to learning

about law highly stimulating and very much like their own Socratic style of questioning. Socratic Method, as O'Connor and Scalia note in their debate, is a skill that encourages critical thinking rather than rote recall. It is Socratic questioning that keeps judges on their toes and constantly puts their interpretative styles in perspective. Teaching Communication Law There is little debate over the inclusion of law in the communication curriculum. Communication law should be part of the required curriculum if the program takes a "nuts and bolts" approach to teaching or is more theory based. The law of media and mass communication is a body of knowledge so uniquely broad and yet narrow and so difficult that it can only be appreciated in the years of formal study. Consider with which guiding philosophy schools of mass communication approach the subject. Media literacy and responsible media use imply adaptive practice and little appreciation for theory. Many communication departments prefer a theoretical approach, through which concepts provide a framework for evaluating case law in media history. Such an approach provides the type of knowledge necessary for critical analysis [9, 10].

Pedagogical Strategies

Pedagogical strategies for enhancing the teaching of "Law and Communication" are explored, stressing an interdisciplinary approach and a robust framework. The distinct yet interconnected disciplines of law and communication necessitate faculty proficient in both areas who can work collaboratively. Instructors should create a framework illustrating how these fields converge, ensuring students perceive the course as encompassing both law and communication. The discussion concludes with the implications of these recommendations. While law and communication are typically independent fields, the lack of collaboration among faculties is noted. It is proposed that faculty teams with expertise in both disciplines teach the course, aiming to address challenges in integrating it into institutions. A clear articulation of existing problems, the importance of a solid framework, and their implications will be addressed. Factors driving the offering of this course include evolving legal perceptions, the relationship between communication and law, and a growing acknowledgment of the need for legal instruction from communication faculties. The sentiment that communication law differs significantly from other areas justifies its instruction by non-lawyers. Courses like "Law of the Press" or "Mass Media Law" ideally suit communication faculty due to their focus on communication methodologies. However, comprehensive legal theory should remain the domain of those with legal qualifications, as the complexity of legal texts and jargon demands a strong background in law for complete understanding [11, 12].

Assessment Methods

In order to construct a suitable assessment for the course, it is crucial to determine what students know before the course begins and identify the learning outcomes being assessed. The aim of the assessment originally designed was to assess student's knowledge on the key concepts covered during the module. The performance criteria focused on two main areas: knowledge of theories of symbolic interaction, dramatisation and notions of the common good; and an ability to articulate how these theories were relevant to their learning experiences as students wishing to become future lawyers. The corresponding assessment was a written reflective essay which incorporated a theory of performance with a case study of an experiential activity. While this may have sufficed in identifying what students did know, it fell short at determining the relevance of that knowledge to them specifically as future lawyers. Revised assessments would focus on what they do not know about the skills involved in law and how this would limit their ability to become effective practitioners. In order to explore the knowledge students already had about their experiences as law students and as potential future lawyers, class discussions were facilitated grounded on the same principles on which the experiential learning activities were based. Using a technique, which places an emphasis on equality, co-constructive discussion techniques and the use of ritual, participants were encouraged to explore their knowledge, feelings and attitudes about a series of questions which attempted to elicit knowledge on the skills, values and ethics of lawyers. The knowledge thus produced formed the content for students' reflective essays on their learning from the module and which was assessed in the end of module exam. Each student was asked to respond to the question "How do I feel on paper? Based on what my notes tell me, what can I do with this knowledge?" reflecting on their previous discussion knowledge as well as on their learning from the module [13, 14].

Challenges in Interdisciplinary Teaching

While cross-listed courses have proven to be successful in some environments, there remain challenges in integrating law and communication courses into a fully interdisciplinary experience. Given the constraints generally placed on law school curriculum, the first challenge is generally just gaining approval for a class offering in an unusual format. This process involves writing a course description, working with a colleague to draft a syllabus, obtaining concurrence from departments in both schools, and writing a formal proposal to the college-level chair and curriculum committee. The approvals

required for a multi-institutional class add layers of complexity, including having to work with deans and other high-level officials on each campus. A second challenge is a longer timeframe for planning and implementation than with typical single-school classes. Collaboration, especially with another school, takes time, and it is often difficult to know how a course will draw on the strengths of both disciplines until the instructors begin to work together on a daily basis. Time is required not only for planning topics, but also for creating assessments. In planning the first joint course, for instance, the two instructors needed to determine what would be graded, how to ensure consistency and fairness, what aspects would be peer-reviewed, and what would be evaluated jointly. It was also necessary to ensure that the assessment criteria for class presentations supported not only effective communication, but also the incorporation of legal analysis and ethical reasoning. Adjusting to changes in the teaching style of one's counterpart while retaining expectations for students proved more challenging than anticipated. Designing a syllabus that accounts for all of these decisions in an unfamiliar environment is daunting. Finally, there are challenges once the class is underway. For example, there can be incongruity in levels of student commitment. Students often perceive law classes as a bit stiffer, while speech students might come from a background where an exercise in speaking is an option. The interdisciplinary method often requires a shift in thinking and is difficult to adjust to, especially when paired with a colleague of a different academic discipline [15, 16].

Best Practices in Teaching Law and Communication

This article aims to clarify how knowledge of the law, along with experiential and problem-based learning methods, can enhance teaching for students in law and communication programs. The authors, committed to improving their teaching practices, emphasize the endless connection between theory and practice, integrating knowledge refinement. They acknowledge the necessity of continuous review in light of recent changes regarding the interplay of law and communication. Their goal is to share their experiences to help practitioners advance these teaching methods. Commitment to lifelong learning is essential in modern law and communication practice. The authors outline practical strategies for developing effective curricula, such as leveraging substantive knowledge of law, employing problem-based learning, and using technology and resources in the classroom. These strategies, while tailored to their context, resonate with educators worldwide facing similar challenges in law and communication education. The complexities of law and communication are highlighted, acknowledging that both fields blur when considered in varied cultural contexts. Since the 1940s, the academic study of media has expanded to include many technologies serving diverse social purposes beyond mass media. Law, too, is multifaceted, with different branches, sources, functions, and cultural implications. The intertwined nature of law and communication reflects society's bureaucratic sophistication and modernity, revealing how effectively laws are communicated to citizens. Thus, teaching law and communication is inherently complex and demanding. Nevertheless, focusing on interactive and multifaceted learning is crucial for competent undergraduate training, benefiting students far beyond mere employment prospects [17, 18].

Case Studies of Successful Programs

A series of successful team-taught medical-law ethics and risk communication courses stemming out of interdisciplinary collaboration among law and communication faculty are described. The fundamentals of the collaborative effort are detailed. The impact of collaboration on the creativity and effectiveness of teaching and student learning was explored. Noteworthy experiences and challenges faced in developing and implementing the project are discussed. The importance of facilitating opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration is emphasized, as are the roles that institutional support, a departmental culture of collaboration, and faculty characteristics can play. Consideration is given to future research opportunities and the practical implications of these findings. The convergence of mass media and communication technologies is blurring the lines between traditional journalism and other media content, and shaping how information is generated and consumed. Further, expert knowledge is now often mediatized and used as a source of entertainment, self-promotion, or social commentary. These transformations were exacerbated by government responses to the pandemic, as officials increasingly interacted with audiences via online communication platforms popularized through voracious citizen media engagement. These trends further complicate the relationship between mass media and expertise, and insights from the debate about how best to teach media law may offer new avenues for effectively negotiating the complications [19, 20].

Future Directions in Interdisciplinary Teaching

As granting professional degrees in law becomes increasingly scrutinized, law schools must justify their existence amidst the so-called "law school blues." Lowered standards for admission, bar passage, and lawyering elevate the risk of losing ABA accreditation. Non-ABA schools may fill the "practice-ready"

niche if bar passage requirements decline. The ethical and responsible response for ABA-accredited institutions is to showcase the profession's beauty and complexity to stakeholders including bar committees and law students. Interdisciplinary classes, co-taught by law professors and experts from other fields, can effectively illustrate that law is intricate and not merely about "thinking like a lawyer." These courses should incorporate insights from various disciplines, thus enriching legal education beyond traditional approaches. Law professors will select topics based on their expertise, offering a diverse array of courses that analyze legal issues through different lenses. Each class, while unique in content, will focus on understanding how one discipline informs legal inquiries. All first-year students should be mandated to enroll in such interdisciplinary classes, despite the inherent challenges of team teaching and the differing methodologies among professors [21, 22].

CONCLUSION

The integration of law and communication through interdisciplinary teaching models offers transformative potential for both educators and students. By moving beyond traditional silos and embracing collaborative pedagogies, institutions can enrich students' intellectual and professional development. The success of such integration lies in strategic planning, institutional commitment, and faculty willingness to innovate. Despite the inherent challenges—ranging from administrative barriers to pedagogical differences—interdisciplinary education equips students with critical thinking, legal literacy, and communicative competence necessary for navigating contemporary societal issues. Effective interdisciplinary instruction fosters deeper learning, promotes ethical awareness, and bridges theoretical and practical knowledge. As academic institutions strive to remain relevant and responsive, interdisciplinary education in law and communication should be prioritized as both a pedagogical necessity and a means of shaping more informed, reflective, and engaged citizens.

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