

Introductory Class for 1L Legal Writing
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Use this exercise in the first week of the fall 1L semester after setting ground rules and describing course expectations.

Essential Questions:

- How does identity shape our role as lawyers?
- How does identity inform/change/uphold the law?

Objectives:

- Class: Students will consider their own identity (y/ies).
- Class: Students will understand that identity is a core concept for professional identity formation.
- Course: Students will become conscious of their socialization as they transition from student to lawyer.
- Course: Students will understand that the law is not neutral. It is made and remade by humans and it operates only to the extent that humans believe in its legitimacy.

Materials:

- **Double sided handout**
- **Ted Talk: Taiye Selasi. Don't Ask Me Where I am From, Ask Me Where I'm A Local**

https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local?language=en

General Notes:

I include the following language in my syllabus and discuss these paragraphs with my students before beginning the exercise.

WELCOME: The text below charts our course for the next fourteen weeks together. At its core, this course is about legal judgment and communication. You will be exposed to new content and new skills. You will feel confused. You may even feel at times like you are flailing. That's okay. Through practice and reflection you will begin a path to mastery. I look forward to providing guidance and support to you on that path.

A NOTE ON PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY & CULTURAL SENSIBILITY: Effective lawyers understand that culture, context, and cognition play important roles in law, legal systems, and the lawyering process. As we evaluate legal problems, predict outcomes, and consider persuasive arguments we will consider how these three "Cs" impact our work. We will ask questions, and then ask more questions, and then ask questions of our questions. In the process, we will work to make the familiar strange so that we can consider information from various perspectives and develop keen critical thinking, reasoning, and communication skills.

A NOTE ON TEAMWORK & PROFESSIONALISM: In practice, lawyers work together to solve complex and challenging problems. Beyond their colleagues, lawyers also work with clients, other members of the bar and bench, and government employees (just for starters). While tackling legal judgment and communication in LPS, you will often be working in teams. Teams “work” when each member participates fully and in a manner that acknowledges the dignity of other team members. This includes listening and speaking respectfully and sharing constructive comments and questions. “Constructive” in our class means that the questions and comments are based on observations, directed at something the recipient can actually change, and sincerely intended to help the recipient. We will tackle tough questions this semester and we may not always agree with one another. In class discussions, I will operate from the perspective that each person in the class has good intentions and encourage you to do the same. This assumption does not preclude the robust exchange of ideas.

Exercise Notes:

- Explain that we will be getting to know one another and also learning about ourselves.
- Pass out double-sided handout. Explain that this document is personal and will not be handed in.
 - Front
 - One question: where are you from?
 - Back
 - One question: where are you a local?
 - Three columns: rituals, relationships, restrictions
- Ask students to take a moment and write down the first thing that comes to their mind when they read the question.
- Ask students whether their answer captures a core identity (can be done by raising hands or anonymous polling).
- **Watch Ted Talk**
- **Whole Class Reflection:** Ask for general reflections. Question prompts:
 - How does Selasi define identity? (set of shared experiences)
 - What are rituals?
 - What are relationships?
 - What are restrictions?
 - How do these concepts impact identity?

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- **Small group work:** What are some of the boxes or labels that we use that privilege a static concept over a complex reality? (document answers in group then report out for discussion)
 - What school did you go to?
 - What is your gpa?
 - Is this school your first choice?
 - Do you live at home?
 - Ask students to take 15 minutes to fill in the three columns. Remind them that this will not be collected. They are generating ideas for their first writing assignment.
 - Wrap up: over the course of this year and throughout your 2L and 3L year you will feel connected with and sometimes distanced from your family, friends, professors, classmates, from rule makers, and rule changers, your clients, and co-workers. You may regret your choice to enter law school and also feel like you have finally found your place. In this class I hope to foster a sense of community and belonging for each person. We will not all likely feel this way at the same time and yet we will be collaborating and working together. Your first writing assignment is to write a letter telling me about where you are a local.
 - Writing Assignment Details:
 - no more than 2 pages single-spaced.
 - Capture rituals, relationships, and restrictions.
 - How do/does your identity (y/ies) impact you as a student? As a lawyer?
 - Hand in assignment in person, in my office.
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