



RAISING THE BAR

EVIDENCE-BASED THINKING ABOUT THE BAR EXAM

Spring 2026
Volume 9 Issue 2

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

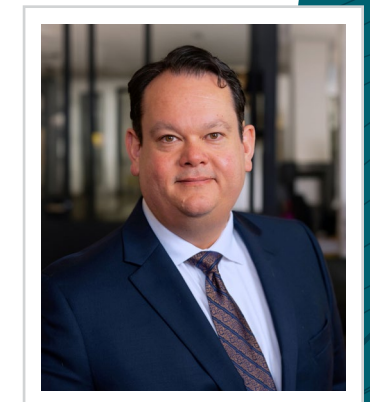
This issue of *Raising the Bar* captures a theme of reconsideration. The contributors featured here do more than describe programs or present findings — they challenge us to examine our assumptions. They invite us to recognize and revisit the patterns of teaching and support we engage in daily, and to reconsider.

In her featured article, Professor Marta Baffy asks us to look at legal reasoning through the lens of language learning. Her work reminds us that what feels intuitive to seasoned practitioners often remains opaque to novices, and that by applying conscious attention to structure and convention we can move students more quickly to the outcomes we hope to achieve. Ashley Madsen's profile of Drake Law's Integrated Study Group program illustrates the reimagining and expansion of the structured study group program into an offering that provides law students with the space to connect with peers and broader support services while developing. These initiatives reflect the best of our community's efforts — thoughtful, evidence-informed, and responsive to the student experience.



The organizational updates from the Association of Academic Support Educators (AASE) and the Committee on Legal Education and Admissions Reform (CLEAR) reinforce how our work exists within a broader system undergoing transformation. As licensure pathways evolve and institutions rethink what it means to prepare students for practice, the voices of academic support educators have become increasingly central. Our colleagues across the country are helping shape a future in which practice readiness, access to justice, and the professional identity of new lawyers are seen as not merely abstract ideals but shared responsibilities of both legal educators and practitioners.

I hope that your spring is replete with reconsideration of standard practices, as well as moments of renewal, rest, and recuperation. I invite you to join us on May 13 for our annual virtual ***Spring Sync Workshop*** — a full day of informational sessions and in-depth panels all viewable from the comfort of your office.



Joel Chanvisanuruk, M.P.A., J.D.

Senior Director, Programs for Academic and Bar Success
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RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Teaching Legal Analysis Through the Lens of Second Language Pedagogy: A Consciousness-Raising Approach

Marta Baffy, Professor of the Practice and Director of Academic Success, University of Baltimore School of Law. She was a 2022–23 recipient of the AccessLex Institute | Association of Academic Support Educators Faculty Scholar Grant. Her full article can be found in the [Journal of Legal Education](#).

Law students often describe their first encounters with the law as “learning a new language.” This description is well-founded: like second-language learners, law students must acquire specialized vocabulary, legal discourse structures, analytic frameworks, and pragmatic conventions to communicate effectively with other members of the legal community. My article, *Teaching Legal Analysis Through the Lens of Second Language Pedagogy: A Consciousness-Raising Approach*, takes this sentiment and argues that, if learning law is like learning a new language, second language pedagogy may well inform our approach to teaching legal writing and analysis.

The article draws on scholarship from second language acquisition (SLA), a vibrant area of linguistics that focuses on how learners acquire a second language, and on instructional approaches that support language learning. One well-established approach to teaching a second language is “consciousness-raising.” Consciousness-raising in the SLA context refers to a form of discovery learning designed to increase learners’ awareness of grammatical features in the second language. Instead of “spoon feeding” grammatical rules, teachers employing a consciousness-raising approach create opportunities for students to work collaboratively with authentic language data



to discover patterns and articulate language rules for themselves. Research suggests that engaging learners in noticing patterns and analyzing grammatical forms promotes deeper understanding of grammatical rules and thereby supports the development of fluent, automatic language use.

I argue that consciousness-raising can be used outside of the traditional second language learning setting and is particularly well-suited to teaching legal writing and analysis. Legal reasoning depends on recurring lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level patterns or “rules.” These rules underpin key features of legal writing, and include the IRAC analytic framework, paragraph organization, syntactic structures for connecting key words from a rule with facts, and discourse moves for making arguments and counterarguments. These rules are often assumed to be intuitive and hence they are not always explicitly taught. However, my work with students suggests that many struggle to achieve proficiency in legal writing because they have not yet developed conscious awareness of the linguistic conventions entailed in writing an effective legal analysis.

The article grounds consciousness-raising in SLA theory and demonstrates how this approach can be adapted to the law classroom. It presents examples drawn from my work in a legal writing course, academic success programming, and orientation settings. Examples include sequencing tasks (e.g., putting scrambled paragraphs in order to form IRAC), identification tasks (e.g., locating key language in a rule), completion tasks (e.g., filling in missing facts in an application paragraph), and judgment and



modification tasks (e.g., diagnosing and fixing weaknesses in a legal analysis). Across these tasks, students engage directly with legal texts and work to uncover the patterns and rules for how to write an effective legal analysis. Rather than simply being told what a “good” analysis looks like, students figure this out for themselves by examining authentic language data. Feedback from students who have completed these tasks suggests that consciousness-raising activities help to demystify legal writing and make expectations more transparent, particularly for students who struggle in traditional first-year legal writing courses.

The article also addresses practical considerations for implementation, including when and how to integrate consciousness-raising tasks into the instructional sequence. Drawing on SLA research, I emphasize the importance of allowing students to process legal content for meaning before directing their attention to the conventions and rules for writing a legal analysis. This is especially important given the intense cognitive demands faced by law students.

Finally, the article emphasizes that consciousness-raising is not a substitute for writing practice. Awareness of the rules that make for an effective legal analysis must be reinforced through repeated opportunities for writing practice, coupled with instructor feedback. When paired with low-stakes formative assessments, consciousness-raising offers a theoretically grounded tool for improving students’ legal writing skills. I invite faculty to help students develop these skills in not only legal writing courses or academic success programming, but throughout law school curriculum.



PROGRAM PROFILE

Drake Law’s Integrated Study Groups Program

Ashley Madsen is the Director of Academic Success at Drake University Law School.

For most 1Ls, entering law school is a daunting experience. Everything feels different: the classroom setup, textbooks, the notetaking style, class lectures using the Socratic method, exams. In addition to all the academic changes, 1Ls are full of other questions that are much too “silly” to ask a professor. What is “Opp LL19?” Is that a classroom? What am I supposed to wear to class? Where do I eat lunch? How do I get one of those desks in the library everyone else seems to be using?

Enter: the Integrated Study Group (ISG). ISG is an academic support program at Drake Law School, which splits the 1L class into groups of 10–15 students. Each group meets once per week with an assigned 2L or 3L Leader to talk about all the things that make law school such a big adjustment.

What sets Drake’s ISG program apart is that it captures so many law school elements in addition to what one may call “run-of-the-mill academic support.” For example, one week, students meet with the law librarians who show them how to access study aids and supplements both in the physical building and online, which coincides with a lesson on how to effectively use those practice questions. Another week, students meet with the Career Development Office to talk about how to search for summer positions and network with employers throughout the semester. Yet another week, students hear from the Iowa Director of Bar Admissions to discuss professional development in the context of what comes after law school, including the bar exam and knowing what will arise in a character and fitness evaluation. The remaining weeks, students meet with their small groups where Leaders guide them through lessons created by the Academic Support Director covering basic law school skills such as notetaking, understanding IRAC format, outlining, time management, and getting ready for final exams. It’s also a social space where students can feel safe to ask those “dumb” questions, reflect on their progress in law school, and build relationships with other students all going through a similar experience.



Reflecting upon the recent years of the ISG program, what stands out is the reported sense of belonging our 2L and 3L Leaders create in their groups. Leaders are given training before the beginning of the semester on how to foster relationships with students, work through tough discussions, and find appropriate resources. During Orientation, ISG Leaders are some of the first upperclassmen the students meet and interact with. Post-first-semester surveys find 1L students providing overwhelmingly positive feedback about their student Leaders and consistently report feeling welcome and supported because of this relationship. At the end of the day, isn't that what every ASP Director strives for?

Many students maintain relationships with their ISG Leaders after the required fall semester sessions, with Leaders continuing to provide advice on identifying and accessing university and law school resources, whether that be with the Counseling Center, Doctrinal Faculty, Teaching Assistants, Student Services, or Career Development. ISG has developed into more than just a study group; it's a community that connects students with all the resources Drake Law School has to offer.



ORGANIZATION UPDATE



Association of Academic Support Educators (AASE)

Nachman N. Gutowski is Director of the Academic Success Program and Associate Professor-in-Residence at the William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He serves as President of the Association of Academic Support Educators for the 2025–26 term.

The 2025–26 year marks a moment of transition, growth, and increasing visibility for the Association of Academic Support Educators (AASE). What began as a professional home for a small but committed group of academic support educators more than a dozen years ago has become a prominent national organization with a clear voice, expanding reach, and a deepening role in shaping the future of legal education and licensure.

AASE represents a broad and vibrant community of legal education professionals working across academic success, bar preparation, assessment, and student development. Our growth this year, both in membership and organizational structure, reflects what many of us have long known: academic support does not belong in the periphery of legal education. It is central. As law schools navigate enrollment pressures, curricular reform, and changing licensure pathways, our work sits squarely at the intersection of institutional responsibility and student success.

This year also underscores a shift in how AASE engages nationally. With formal recognition as an affiliate organization of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, AASE is now positioned to contribute more directly to conversations that shape standards, definitions, and reform efforts. This recognition affirms the expertise of our members and ensures that the perspectives of academic success educators are represented in decision-making.

Perhaps nowhere is AASE's leadership more visible than in the ongoing transition to the NextGen Uniform Bar Exam. While the structure of licensure continues to evolve, academic support educators have been doing what we do best. We anticipate change, translate uncertainty into strategy, and help students and institutions adapt. Through programming, collaboration, and shared expertise, AASE members are helping law schools rethink preparation, skills integration, and assessment in ways that align learning with practice and licensure outcomes.

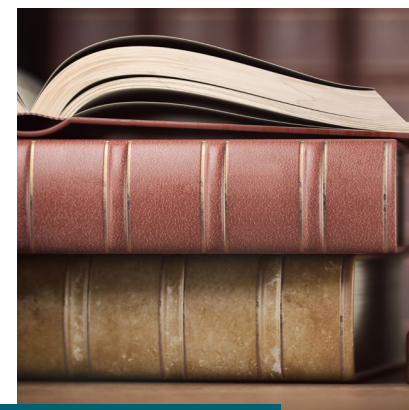
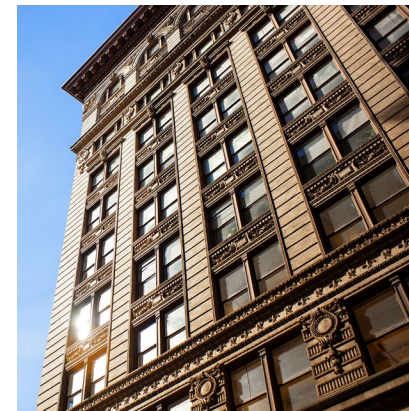
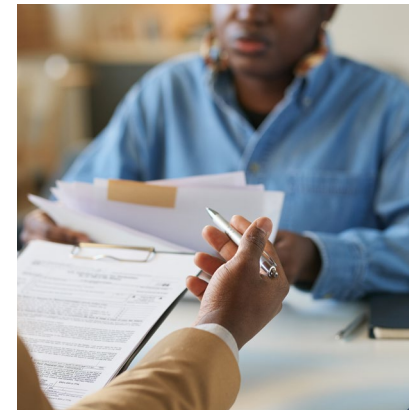
AASE's internal growth this year reflects the same intentionality. We expanded our membership model to strengthen connections among individual educators, institutions, and vendor partners, and launched new resources to support professional development and mobility. The AASE Career Center responds to a long-standing need in our field: centralizing employment opportunities for our membership.

Scholarship remains a critical point of influence for the Academy. With the launch of the AASE Scholarship Library and the continued vitality of platforms like the Law School Academic Support Blog and the revitalization of the AALS Section on Academic Supports' The Learning Curve, our collective work is more visible and accessible than ever. These efforts reinforce academic support's grounding in pedagogy, research, and reflective practice. As such, its contributions belong firmly within the Academy.

At its core, AASE remains committed to fostering environments where students can develop confidence, competence, and a sense of belonging in law school and beyond. Academic support educators work daily to identify barriers, normalize struggle, and cultivate growth. These are not abstract ideals, but a lived practice embedded in classrooms, programs, and advising relationships nationwide.

As we look ahead to the 13th Annual Conference, *High Stakes, Big Impact*, at the William S. Boyd School of Law from May 19–21, we do so with clarity about who we are and where we are going. AASE is not merely a professional association, but a collective voice, a source of leadership, and a community shaping the future of legal education from the ground up. Our members have been at the forefront for years.

The state of AASE is strong, and we aren't finished yet!



Committee on Legal Education and Admissions Reform (CLEAR)

Rob Wall is a Senior Court Management Consultant at the National Center for State Courts, which provided staffing for the Committee on Legal Education and Admissions Reform.

The legal profession is failing to meet the public's need for legal services. The justice gap results in alarming numbers of Americans unable to find assistance for life-changing legal issues that affect their families, housing, safety, finances, and their liberty. While the causes of the justice gap are multifaceted, as are the solutions that will bridge it, one root cause is clear: far too few attorneys are positioned to assist litigants with these serious legal challenges. This reality has ripple effects across our communities resulting in lessened economic opportunities, weakened family stability, and eroded trust in courts and other social institutions.

Against this backdrop, the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) established the Committee on Legal Education and Admissions Reform (CLEAR) in August 2023 to undertake a comprehensive examination of legal education, licensure, and entry into the practice of law in the United States. As the primary regulators of the legal profession in their respective jurisdictions, state supreme courts play a critical leadership role in ensuring that the public has access to competent legal representation. CLEAR's charge was to assess how legal education and licensure can address the justice gap crisis and ensure public trust and confidence in the legal profession.

Over 18 months, CLEAR engaged in intensive factfinding to examine how legal education, licensure, and the training of new attorneys can respond to these challenges. Three working groups comprised of a broad range of stakeholders explored the interrelated themes of practice readiness, bar admissions, and public service. A full list of Committee and Working Group members can be found in the [CLEAR Executive Summary](#). Additionally, CLEAR conducted 90 stakeholder interviews, convened 12 regional listening sessions, surveyed 9,000 total judges, lawyers, and law students, and held the National Convening on the Future of Legal Education and Admissions.

These efforts revealed creative solutions and innovations across the country from which we can draw encouragement. Throughout the country, courts, legal educators, and the practicing bar are working to improve the practice readiness of new attorneys, strengthen pathways into public service, and green legal deserts. However, the reach and effectiveness of their innovations and reforms are often hindered by entrenched institutional impediments and the realities of regional and geographic limitations.



CLEAR's work culminated in a final report that provides a roadmap for state supreme courts to lead efforts to ensure the legal profession better addresses the legal needs of the communities they serve, calling on state supreme courts to:

1. Lead collaborative efforts to align legal education, bar admissions, and other efforts to improve new lawyers' practice readiness with the legal needs of the public;
2. Implement state-level strategies to improve practice readiness;
3. Encourage law school accreditation that serves the public;
4. Reduce reliance on external law school ranking;
5. Encourage experiential learning that involves client responsibility;
6. Reform bar admissions processes to better meet public needs;
7. Support public service attorneys; and
8. Encourage rural practice.

In July 2025, CCJ/COSCA established a standing CLEAR committee to implement these recommendations. CLEAR's ongoing work is defined by its collaboration across jurisdictions and institutions, and its continued success will rely on engagement from bar support and bar licensure professionals. As CLEAR's work develops, we encourage you to read the [CLEAR Report](#) and to [provide your feedback](#).



CONFERENCE CORNER

- [Conference on Clinical Legal Education](#) (May 1–5)
- [AccessLex Institute’s Spring Sync Workshop](#) (May 13)
- [Association of Academic Support Educations Annual Conference](#) (May 19–21)
- [Workshop for New Law School Teachers](#) (June 4–6)
- [National Association of Law Student Affairs Professionals Conference](#) (June 9–11)
- [Institute for Law Teaching and Learning Summer Conference](#) (June 17–20)
- [Legal Writing Institute Conference](#) (July 15–18)
- [American Association of Law Libraries Annual Meeting](#) (July 18–21)
- [Southeastern Association of Law Schools \(SEALS\) Annual Conference](#) (July 26–Aug 1)
- [Workshop on Research Design for Causal Inference](#) (Aug 3–7)

Please email RTB@accesslex.org about upcoming bar-related conferences.

PUBLICATIONS AND POSTS

- Suzanne Darrow-Kleinhaus, [Even If You’ve Adopted the NextGen UBE, Your Work Isn’t Done Yet](#), 40 Touro L. Rev. 889 (2025).
- Gregory M. Duhl, [All In: Embedding AI in the Law School Classroom](#), SSRN (Dec. 16, 2025).
- Donna L. Eng, [Keeping the Ball Rolling: Enhancing the LRW and Skills Curriculum by Incorporating NextGen Bar Foundational Skills and AI Innovations](#), Second Draft (Jan. 9, 2026).
- Stephen E. Henderson, [Teaching Law](#), SSRN (Jan. 27, 2026).
- Julianne Hill, [A Dozen Ways That Bar Licensure Could Change in 2026](#), ABA J. (Dec. 23, 2025).
- Robert R. Kuehn, [It’s Again CLEAR: Legal Education Is Still Not Adequately Training Graduates for Practice](#), *Clinical Legal Educ. Ass’n Newsl.*, Winter 2024–2025.
- Robert R. Kuehn & Peter A. Joy, [Measuring the Impacts of Experiential Legal Education](#), 73 J. Legal Educ. 683 (2025).
- Karen Sloan, [New US Bar Exam Is Put to the Test](#), Reuters (Jan. 8, 2026).

Please email RTB@accesslex.org with recent and forthcoming bar-related publications, posts, and podcasts to be included in future issues of *Raising the Bar*.

RESOURCES FOR LEGAL EDUCATORS AND LAW STUDENTS

Research and Data

- [AccessLex Resource Collections](#)
- [Analytix by AccessLex®](#)
- [Legal Education Data Deck](#)

Student Resources

- [AccessLex Law School Scholarship Databank](#)
- [AccessLex Student Loan Calculator](#)
- [MAX by AccessLex®](#)

Please email RTB@accesslex.org with information about resources for faculty and students in your jurisdiction.

Research Fellowships, Grants, and Partnerships

- [AccessLex Bar Success Intervention Grant Program](#)
- [AccessLex Bar Success Research Grant Program](#)
- [American Association of Law Libraries \(AALL\)](#)
- [Bar Exam Success Analyses Program](#)
- [Professionals in Legal Education Developing Greater Equity \(PLEDGE\) Initiative](#)

ASP and Bar Success Resources

- [ABA Bar Information for Applicants with Disabilities](#)
- [AccessLex Building Bar Skills Modules](#)
- [CALI Lessons](#)
- [JDEdge by AccessLex®](#)
- [NCBE Bar Admission Guide](#)
- [NCBE Bar Exam Fundamentals for Legal Educators](#)
- [NCBE's The Bar Examiner](#)
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Joel Chanvisanuruk, Senior Editor

Fletcher Hiigel, Managing Editor



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