

# AALS — Supporting the Student Scholar

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January 2025

# Important Topic

## Why Independent Studies Matter

- Students outnumber faculty, producing more knowledge
- Law school  $\neq$  PhD: almost all students aim beyond academia
- Challenges and opportunities in personalized, rigorous learning

# Focus of Discussion

## Supporting Independent Studies

- Flexibility and individualized learning goals
- Balancing flexibility with academic rigor in 1-on-1 environments

# Pedagogical Approach

## Adult Learning Theory

- Recognizing challenges unique to adult learners
- Building on individualized ambitions and capacities
- Competency-Based Grading
  - Move towards specifications grading
  - See Tierney, *Grade Insurance*, J. Legal Ed. (forthcoming 2025)
  - Evaluate competency relative to student ambitions

# Diverse Student Ambitions

## Categories of Goals

- **Publishable Papers:**

- Motivations: Career, academic, or personal growth
- Originality, depth of contribution

- **Writing Samples:**

- Motivations: Employment, clerkships, or graduate programs
- Focus on reasoning, research, clarity

- **Exploring Topics for Curiosity or Credit:**

- Motivations: Degree requirements, intellectual interest, resume line (RA or TA)
- Flexibility, privately ordered outcomes

# Structuring Independent Studies

## Framework design

- Syllabus with flexible options
- Deadlines and milestones for accountability
- Rubrics clarifying expectations for depth and output
- All of this takes a ton of time, and should be done for credit to the instructor (if you are not getting teaching credit, ask for it)

# Structuring Independent Studies

## Common Challenges

- Credit hour limitations (only 1 hour / semester, vs. stacking hours) relate to the scaling of an IS project's scope and topic
- Narrowing broad ideas into viable research questions
- Most important pedagogical tool is walking students literally through the pages they have, and relating it to structure
  - Assume 25 pages double spaced
  - 2 for intro, 1 for conclusion
  - That leaves about 7 pages each for the three main sections (problem, solution, implications)
  - Lightbulb moment for students about how they must quickly “get to the point,” limiting scope of topic

# Research Strategies

## Effective Research

- Early deliverables like source lists for feedback
- Awareness of tools: Google Scholar, SSRN, administrative law nuances



# Support

## Mentoring for Publishing

- Identifying topics matching gaps in scholarship and student interest
- Workshopping arguments and journal submission guidance

## Career-Focused Writing

- Aligning topics with career goals and relevance
- Emphasizing clarity, structure, and legal reasoning
- Iterative reviews for polished outputs

# Support

## Open Learning Opportunities

- Flexibility to propose and explore diverse topics
- Encouraging intellectual curiosity and rigor
- Possibility of using this at some schools to supplement RA or TA support, for students for whom the cost-benefit works out to prefer hours over cash pay

# Concluding remarks

## Scaling Support

- Tailoring mentorship intensity to ambition and needs
- Leveraging AI responsibly to support writing and research
- Institutional considerations: resource allocation, credit, and workload