

Legal Writing Goes Global | *By Tina Potterf*

School of Law professors take program to legal professionals worldwide

Laurel Oates and Mimi Samuel of the School of Law have gone global with the top Legal Writing Program in the United States, as consistently ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*.

The Legal Writing Program, which focuses on effective, concise and compelling writing for legal cases—following grammar and punctuation rules, naturally—continues its international expansion that began in 2003. That year Oates, professor of law and director of the Legal Writing Program, teamed up with colleague Mimi Samuel, associate professor of lawyering skills at the law school, to replicate the success of the program spearheaded by Oates and School of Law Professor Anne Enquist and Christopher Rideout, associate director of legal writing.

Law professionals overseas learned about SU's program through the Legal Writing Institute, which Oates helped establish in 1984. Comprised of 2,500 legal academics representing more than 200 law schools nationwide, the institute is the second largest group of legal academics in the world, according to Oates. Its aim is to improve how legal writing is taught; every two years the institute offers a national conference, with regional conferences held year round.

Soon Oates and Samuel were fielding requests from colleagues abroad. They started in Uganda, organizing and leading training sessions on effective legal writing for judges, lawyers and

law professors who wanted to write in a manner removed from the rigid and stodgy style that had predominated. Two trips to Uganda led to seven-month stays in India, East Africa and South Africa to teach workshops and courses. In 2007, a conference in East Africa showcased best practices for legal writing professors in Africa and the United States.

"We are trying to make the law accessible," Oates says.

In December, Oates, Samuel and legal writing instructor Janet Dickson will take the program to the University of Zululand, near Durban, South Africa, where they will train faculty and others in the legal community who want to acquire the skills necessary to train within their own countries.

"Working abroad we get to see things and meet people we never would as tourists," Samuel says.

The pair has led sessions on effective writing for magistrates in Uganda and governmental lawyers in South Africa and Botswana, to name a few. In recent years, they taught at a law school in Shanghai and led legal writing sessions on methodology and active learning in Afghanistan. Through the years, Oates and Samuel streamlined and tailored their teachings based on the needs of the participants, including many

who are non-native English speakers. Practicing attorneys are generally more interested in learning how to be more effective in communication, whereas magistrates may have a session that offers tools to write for different audiences. Sessions on grammar, punctuation and persuasion, for example, are pared down to the basics but are still interactive.

"This is not about us coming in and saying, 'this is the American way of doing this,'" Samuel says. "We are making it work within their existing [legal] system."

Flexibility is key, Oates and Samuel concur, to adapt the program to changing countries and cultures. Resources readily available in Seattle—textbooks and Internet access, for example—may be extremely limited or nonexistent in a classroom or courtroom in Africa. Legal writing books can be dense and expensive to travel with so Oates and her colleagues put together a compact legal writing guide. The guide covers subjects such as writing structure so law students can write like lawyers and lawyers and judges can write for diverse cases.

The success of the Legal Writing Program at home and afar is credited not only to the work of Oates and Samuel but also to law students, faculty and deans, past and present, who have supported their efforts along the way.

Says Oates, "We have this great legal writing community and faculty here."

"We are trying to make the law accessible."

LAUREL OATES, LAW PROFESSOR/DIRECTOR,
LEGAL WRITING PROGRAM



Mimi Samuel and Laurel Oates with participant, Kapeko Kapeko at a training in Botswana.

▶ SOUTH AFRICA LEGAL PROGRAM OPEN TO ALUMNI

Have you always wanted to visit South Africa? If so, this may be your chance while earning 20 CLE credits. Beginning in 2012, the first week of Seattle University's South Africa Study Abroad Program at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg will be open to Seattle University alumni and members of the bench and the bar. Each morning, participants will join U.S. and South African law students for lectures on South Africa's history, politics

and legal system. Afternoons will be spent on field trips, including to the magistrate courts, the Constitutional Court, the Apartheid Museum and a legal clinic, in addition to cultural activities.

The tentative dates for the program are June 3–9, 2012. For more information, contact Roxanne Mennes at mennesr@seattleu.edu.