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Journals help UO law students gain valuable expertise

The University boasts three prestigious publications that give future lawyers experience in legalese

BY TYLER GRAF
 FREELANCE REPORTER

Humorist Will Rogers said that lawyers don't write for posterity, they write so that endless others in their craft can spend years trying to figure out what they said.

It is true that lawyers don't generally write for the public at large, they write for each other. At the University's School of Law, there are three legal journals on which second and third-year law students can gain invaluable experience with legalese.

The Oregon Law Review is the oldest journal at the law school. Started in 1921, it is also the second-oldest continuously published law journal on the West Coast. Over its 84-year history, the OLR has published more than 300 issues, covering local, national and international issues. Last year, the OLR published scholarly work accompanying the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, the storied Supreme Court case that desegregated schools, and the 40th anniversary of New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, which helped develop current libel standards for publications.

The second-oldest law journal is the Journal of Environmental Law and Litigation, which began in 1985.

For 20 years, JELL has prepared students for careers in environmental law. Published biannually, JELL publishes articles on environmental issues that run the gamut from the theoretical to the practical.

"Many of the contributors are interested in working for public interest groups, such as the Sierra Club, when they graduate," said Keith Aoki, a faculty advisor for the journal.

Dan Atkinson, a senior editor for JELL, said that being an environmentalist is not a prerequisite for the journal.

The newest law journal is the

Oregon Review of International Law, which began in 1999 as a symposium publication.

According to its Web site, "ORIL seeks to publish informative articles that describe the legal aspects of (international) treaties and the responsibilities they impose on national governments. In addition, our publications have addressed issues in the fields of human rights, taxation, environmental issues and other varied topics."

Typically, law professors and practitioners submit articles for the law reviews, said Judd Sneirson, a faculty advisor for OLR. However, submissions are open to the general public, solicited or not.

The most important factor of the law reviews is the experience they give to lawyers-to-be.

"It's important because doing the editing makes students more detail-oriented and aware of cutting-edge legal scholarship," Sneirson said. "And being on a journal gives the impression that one is doing well in law school."

It is also important for the legal profession, said Sneirson. Legal scholarship generally comes from journals, not books. This legal scholarship is often cited in court decisions.

In the 2004 Oregon Supreme Court decision for Yancy v. Shatzer, the court cited an article from the first issue of the OLR.

Gaining membership to one of the journals is highly competitive. During the first two weeks of law school, the journals hold a competition for second- and third-year students. The competition includes a "closed-universe" essay portion and a cite check portion, which requires students to check legal scholarship for proper citations. The tests are then blind-graded by journal editors who invite a set number of students to join one of the journals.

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