

Pam DeMartino:

Welcome to the Widener Wordsmith, a podcast series designed to enhance and supplement legal methods here at Widener University Commonwealth Law School. I am Pam DiMartino, an adjunct professor of legal methods, and the host of this series. Joining me throughout this year will be attorneys from both academia and legal practice who will provide listeners with advice and insight into the challenging process of legal writing.

Pam DeMartino:

Hello, 1Ls, and welcome to your first episode of the Widener Wordsmith podcast series. I'm Pam DiMartino, and I look forward to our time together throughout this year. I'd like to begin by congratulating each of you for committing to the program of studies here at Widener Commonwealth Law. In the words of Charles Dickens, your first year of law school will be the best of times. and the worst of times.

Pam DeMartino:

This podcast series is intended to help you through your learning this first year, which by now you should all realize includes learning to research the law. Once you gather all of your needed authorities, you must then document them in your writing, according to the rules of the Bluebook.

Pam DeMartino:

With me today is Professor Dionne Anthon, author of The Bluebook Uncovered, one of your required textbooks for legal methods. Welcome, Professor, and thank you for joining me today.

Dionne Anthon:

Thanks for having me.

Pam DeMartino:

You're very welcome. I was quite excited when you accepted the invitation to record this in person, because I know that in addition to teaching here at the law school, you also reside in Florida.

Dionne Anthon:

I do. I used to teach here full time. For many years I did that, and I moved to Florida about four years ago, but I love Widener Law so much that I try to come back as often as possible. And I love teaching first year, so I've been involved with the Intro to Legal Process class during orientation. This now is my third year doing that, which is great. And then I've also been teaching an upper level legal methods 3 course, mine specifically is technology and communication, but there are many different legal methods, three offerings that students have to choose from.

Pam DeMartino:

All right, that's wonderful. So you actually had the opportunity then to perhaps meet many of our listeners.

Dionne Anthon:

Absolutely. Yes I have. And I used to teach Legal Methods 1 and 2 when I was here full time. So I'm very familiar with teaching first years and really enjoy teaching first year students/

Pam DeMartino:

And in particular, that course, the legal methods course and their introduction to the whole realm of legal research and legal writing and what that entails.

Dionne Anthon:

Yes, of course I'm biased, but that is the most important class.

Pam DeMartino:

Absolutely. Absolutely, which is why this podcast is primarily focused on those efforts. Well, the primary purpose I also with the podcast series is to acquaint the students with the authors of some of the texts that are used in that particular program. Your text, The Bluebook Uncovered, is one of the three required for first years.

Pam DeMartino:

We're hoping that you're going to give us some insight on what inspired you to come up with the book, and to write the book, and to publish it, and offer us some advice on how we might use it. If I can back up for a minute, another fascinating aspect of your life is your educational journey. It really doesn't follow perhaps the traditional trajectory of an attorney. Maybe you could share some of your educational experience with the listeners.

Dionne Anthon:

Yes, I was not someone who went right from undergrad to law school. I had in my mind that I knew I wanted to go to law school, but I had worked for six, seven years after I went to undergrad. Then I got my MBA and then worked in the information technology consulting field for a while.

Dionne Anthon:

That's actually where I got my first taste of teaching, because I had an opportunity to be an instructor at a training center at a firm, on technology. And I loved teaching so much, I knew I wanted to get into the legal field, so when I went to law school, I had in my mind that I ultimately wanted to teach and was able then to get into teaching legal research and writing, which is the area where I really wanted to get into once I started teaching.

Pam DeMartino:

All right. Then at some point along the way, you came up with this idea that a text that could accompany the Bluebook might prove helpful.

Dionne Anthon:

Yes, yes. I think so. As you mentioned, this book is one of the three required books. There's a main textbook on the concept of legal methods, the legal research and writing, and then the Bluebook itself, which are the rules for how to cite legal authority. But it's very hard just to pick up that book of rules and figure out how to cite if you're not familiar with it. So my book is actually to help use the Bluebook.

Dionne Anthon:

And it did not start out, my initial goal was not to publish a book. Actually, it started out we used to have our students use a different book and tool to help with Bluebook citations. And I wanted to try to come up with something a little better. Students seem to struggle a lot with Bluebook citations. And so I spoke to my colleagues and said, I'd like to put some materials instead of using what we've used in the past. Is that okay? Would you want to use those?

Dionne Anthon:

And my colleagues said that would be great. Yes, we'll use it. And so it started out one year as I was just writing materials to give to our students that they could use to help with Bluebook citations.

Pam DeMartino:

Like a work in progress.

Dionne Anthon:

It was a huge work in progress during the semester, so it was some late nights just trying to put together the materials just in time for when the students needed them. And it was two of my colleagues, professors Anna Hemingway and Amanda Sholtis, are actually the ones who said, you really should consider having this published. And that's what started the publication process for me with that. It was not my initial intent, but that's what it turned out.

Pam DeMartino:

I'm guessing their recommendation was based on the positive response that they were receiving from students.

Dionne Anthon:

I think it was positive response from students, but also just their response to the materials and how they could see how they were different than what else was out there and how helpful it was to students.

Pam DeMartino:

Well, I can share from personal experience that back in the day when I went to law school, there wasn't an accompanying book that we could consult.

Dionne Anthon:

I don't remember having anything, either.

Pam DeMartino:

Nothing. And you kind of thought, well, how hard can it be, until you you delved into it. So as you said earlier on, it's not always black and white and it's not always spot on applicable to what it is that you're trying to do. So I know that last year, which was my first year really working with the text, I found it incredibly helpful to explain some of the thinking and the reasoning and how to approach some of the citation.

Dionne Anthon:

Yeah. It was something that certainly initially I had 1Ls in mind, but it's also good, it's one of those things if you're going to be doing Bluebook citations, and you're going to do them second year, third year, fourth year if you're in the extended division. And then when you get out and practice or at your summer jobs while you're in law school, it can be helpful for that just as a reminder of how to do Bluebook citations.

Pam DeMartino:

So could you explain perhaps the function of the text in terms of how it can best accompany the students' study of the Bluebook when they're being assigned the particular chapters to read, because they're going to receive this throughout the year.

Dionne Anthon:

Right. Right. What will happen is students will be assigned certain chapters in The Bluebook Uncovered. Students should also have the book with them as they are looking through and reading The Bluebook Uncovered chapters. And because The Blue Uncovered is going to be referring to the applicable rules and tables in the Bluebook. So it certainly would be beneficial to have the actual Bluebook there.

Pam DeMartino:

Side-by-side.

Dionne Anthon:

Side-by-side, yes.

Pam DeMartino:

It should be a side-by-side reading effort.

Dionne Anthon:

Yes. But I do recommend reading the chapters, I'll say first, using that as the main guide and then going to the rules, if there's anything more specific that is needed. But I designed each of the chapters, and they're based on the different types of legal authorities that you could be citing. One of the main ones would be cases, and so there's a whole chapter on how do you cite a case. And you use the book to help because the main rules that you're going to always encounter, that's what this book covers.

Dionne Anthon:

Certainly there are a lot of very nuanced rules that don't come up very often, and that wouldn't be helpful to first-year students. It would make this book unreasonably long and just unnecessary for learning the real basics of what you need for Bluebook citations.

Pam DeMartino:

And I appreciate that point because it really isn't a lengthy read and the way that you write, it's focused and it takes you right where you need to go, and it's easy to follow as compared to the Bluebook itself, which again, over the course of all this years, has failed to condense itself.

Dionne Anthon:

Right. Right.

Dionne Anthon:

And the Bluebook itself doesn't tell you how the rules relate to each other.

Pam DeMartino:

It does not. You're correct.

Dionne Anthon:

And so that's really what this book helps you. If you're going to be citing cases, there are some main rules, but a lot of other rules come into play. And you won't know that, really, unless you have some other guide, which is what The Blue Uncovered is for. And it's not a very long book, but a lot of the pages in the book also, it's not even texts, it's exercises, because that was one of the big things you can't just write about. Here's how you do a citation. But I think the primary way for students to learn how to do citations is to have some practice with it. And the practice is not, here's a case, go cite it.

Dionne Anthon:

Looking at the rules or Bluebook Uncovered, the beginning exercises in each chapter are multiple choice questions that are step-by-step guiding students into very specific rules. Because with multiple choice questions, you can hone in on one particular aspect, or one particular rule, and the answer choices, there can be just a couple of differences. So it forces students to think okay, there must be a rule about whether a comma here, because they can see the differences in the answer choices. And then once they choose an answer, whether it's right or wrong, they're going to see, here's why the right answer is right, and what's wrong about some of those other answers. So it's not just the actual text and the chapters that is part of the learning. The exercises are just as important to the learning.

Pam DeMartino:

It's critical.

Pam DeMartino:

And I appreciate it also from the exercises, it really does emphasize the specificity that is required in documenting legal research, and how careful our 1Ls are going to have to be as they develop their writing skills. And why I emphasized last year, this is not something that you'll ever be required to memorize, but why it's so important to know where your resources are and how to use those resources.

Dionne Anthon:

Yeah. That's a great point. No one should try to memorize the Bluebook. There's a lot to learn in law school, memorizing the Bluebook should not be a goal.

Pam DeMartino:

And it's not needed for the bar exams, and even in practice, it's never going to be expected, but as you pointed out, perhaps taking these resources with them and knowing and understanding how they work, that expectation is something they should be prepared for.

Dionne Anthon:

Absolutely.

Pam DeMartino:

So is there anything at this juncture that you would like to recommend as an overall caveat to our 1Ls with regard to their Bluebook citations or their journey here?

Dionne Anthon:

Well, in terms of Bluebook citations, I would say recognize that it will be frustrating at first, even having something like The Blue Uncovered that is trying to make it easier than just looking at the Bluebook. If you haven't done much citing before, in any sort of format, it's difficult and it's not just going to come overnight. So to have practice with it, don't get frustrated, and to work at it and use the help that you have, not only with Bluebook Uncovered, do the exercises, but take advantage of going to your professor with questions, going to your academic success fellow with questions, and really using those resources. I would say not only for Bluebook stuff, but everything in general, not only your methods classes, but also your other classes.

Pam DeMartino:

Particularly this first year.

Dionne Anthon:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And there's a lot, there definitely is a lot, especially first semester, first year, can get a little overwhelming at times. But as a student, you just have to remember to keep up with your work. We're giving students the tools and skills in our Intro to Legal Process class, in terms of case briefing, outlining, studying, taking exams, writing exams. Really practice with that throughout the semester, and do it throughout the semester so that you are ready at the end of the semester.

Pam DeMartino:

And in addition then to their professors and their academic success fellows, if any of our students had perhaps a particular question with regard to your book, may they reach out to you through your school email?

Dionne Anthon:

Absolutely. I welcome any student coming to me with questions, comments, suggestions, absolutely.

Pam DeMartino:

That would be wonderful, because again, not too often do we have our authors actually walking in the halls and being able to respond to our particular concerns or questions as they go along. So that would be great. Well, again, I thank you so much for making the time to share your experience as an attorney, as a professor, and as a writer. And we thank you for joining us.

Dionne Anthon:

Thank you very much.

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Pam DeMartino:

This podcast series was made possible by a generous grant award from the Association of Legal Writing Directors, and the collaborative and creative support of the legal methods faculty at Widener University Commonwealth Law School.

Outro:

Widener University Commonwealth Law School is the Pennsylvania capital's only law school with three specialized centers of legal scholarship through its Law and Government Institute, Environmental Law and Sustainability Center and business advising program. Widener Law Commonwealth offers an exceptional learning experience that is personal, practical, and professional. Visit commonwealthlaw.widener.edu for more information.