



Implementing Best Practices & Educating Lawyers: Teaching Skills and Professionalism Across the Curriculum

Workshop  
4B

A World of Yes: Using the Language of Cognitive  
Optimism to Help Students Achieve

*Corie Rosen*

*Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Arizona State University*

Corie Lynn Rosen is a permanent instructor in law and the director of the Academic Support Program at Arizona State University. At ASU, Ms. Rosen directs and implements programs and courses designed to help first, second, and third year students realize their academic potential. Currently, she is also working with the law school to develop comprehensive undergraduate Legal Studies programs for both Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts students.

Ms. Rosen holds a JD from the University of California at Los Angeles and a BA in English Literature from the University of California at Berkeley. She is thrilled to be a part of this Teaching and Learning Conference and looks forward to acquiring wisdom from all those in attendance.

**A WORLD OF YES:  
USING THE LANGUAGE OF COGNITIVE OPTIMISM TO HELP STUDENTS ACHIEVE**

yes is a world  
& in this world of  
yes live  
(skillfully curled)  
all worlds

e.e. cummings

**OPENING EXERCISE**

Before we begin, please take a moment to answer the following questions:

- 1) Picture your most challenging student or group of students. Who/whom are you picturing?

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- 2) What are the specific challenges faced by that particular student or group of students?  
How did you develop an awareness of these challenges?

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- 3) Think back now. What kind of language have you heard that student or students using to express frustration, dejection, confusion, or like emotions. What words or attitudes have you noticed?

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- 4) Think back again. When you interact with this student or group of students, what language do you use to motivate, reassure, or encourage? If you are having trouble picturing a specific student or group, think generally. How have you responded to negativity in the classroom or in one-one-one counseling?

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**EXPLORING STUDENT RESPONSES WORKSHEET**

*“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity;  
an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”  
-- Winston Churchill*

Please evaluate the following student statements according to the scale below. Use your best judgment. There are no right or wrong answers.

OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM SCALE

1 – Extremely Optimistic

2- Somewhat Optimistic

3 – Neutral, Neither Optimistic Nor Pessimistic

4 – Somewhat Pessimistic

5 – Extremely Pessimistic

1. “When I study, I always struggle with the Rule Against Perpetuities. I will never master it.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. “Every one of my professors makes things more difficult by ‘hiding the ball’ during class discussions. My friends in other section don’t have professors who do that.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. “I am just not logical enough to make learning the law easy.” \_\_\_\_\_

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4. “The law is very difficult for me to learn right now.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. “All professors tend to ‘hide the ball’ to make class more challenging. It must be something they learn at law professor training camp.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. “Learning the law is difficult if you have never been asked to use the logical part of your brain before. Logic is like anything else – it’s a skill that comes with practice. I just hope I can do what it takes to acquire it.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. “I always work hard and do what it takes to succeed.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. “I know law school is one of the hardest things in the world to do. I am not going to expect too much of myself. If I can get through and graduate, that will be enough for me.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. “I am just not very smart. Law school will always be a struggle for me.” \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. “The people who are naturally good at law school just have some kind of advantage. Either they are innately logical, or they were exposed to this material before. I feel like I am too far behind to ever catch up to them.” \_\_\_\_\_

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**FINDING SOURCES OF OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM: HOW  
OPTIMISTIC ARE YOU RIGHT NOW?**

*“These are the soul’s changes. I don’t believe in aging.  
I believe in forever altering one’s aspect toward the sun.”  
-- Virginia Woolfe*

For each of the following, attribute the event to one of the two possible sources:

1. Your ASP class performs exceptionally well. You think:
  - a. I kept close tabs on all of the students. (1)
  - b. The students were an especially hardworking group. (PsG)
  
2. You and your dean have an argument over whether to offer a bar course for credit. After the argument, you agree to disagree. You attribute the amicable resolution to the fact that:
  - a. I forgave the dean for defending his perspective. After all, everyone is entitled to his or her point of view.
  - b. I am a forgiving person. (1) (PmG)
  
3. You ask a question at a colloquium and are praised by your most difficult, and most prestigious, faculty member. You think:
  - a. That faculty member thinks I’m intelligent and likes me, although he is difficult with other people.

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- b. I am an intelligent, likable person. (1) (PvG)
4. You miss an important meeting. You think:
- a. Sometimes I forget things. (1)
  - b. I forgot to check my calendar. (PvB)
5. Your library fines you because you have an overdue book. You think:
- a. I always forget to turn in books when I am working on an important article. (1)
  - b. I got too engrossed in my research and forgot to return the book. (PmB)
6. You tell a joke and your entire class laughs. You think:
- a. That's a good joke. I'll use it again next semester.
  - b. My timing was spot on that time. (1) (PsG)
7. A colleague says something that hurts your feelings. You think:
- a. She can be careless. She often blurts things out without thinking of others. (1)
  - b. She took her frustration out on me. (PmB)
8. Your dean comes to you for advice on a new program. You think:
- a. I am an expert in the area he needs help with.
  - b. I am good at giving thoughtful advice on academic ideas. (1) (PvG)

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9. You win a prestigious academic award. You think:
- a. I wrote a paper that solved a real, legal problem.
  - b. I was the best teacher. (1) (PvG)
10. You are asked to chair an important committee. You think:
- a. I just successfully chaired a similar committee.
  - b. I am a good chairperson. (1) (PmG)
11. You misspeak frequently while lecturing. You think:
- a. Lecturing is difficult. (1)
  - b. I was tongue tied that day. (PmB)
12. You host a speaker and few people come to the luncheon you organized. You think:
- a. I am irritable when I'm under pressure. People want to avoid me when I'm like that. (1)
  - b. My colleagues are negligent about activities like lunches. (PsB)
13. Your students' semester scores are at an all time low.
- a. I didn't know much about how to help that particular group. (1)
  - b. I made some poor decisions as to how to guide this group. (PvB)

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14. You ask to be placed on an important committee and your request is denied.
- a. I didn't work hard enough at convincing the committee organizer that my views were critically valuable ones. (1)
  - b. The person who was placed on the committee knew the people in power better.  
(PsB)

SCORING YOUR SELF-TEST

G Score \_\_\_\_\_

B Score \_\_\_\_\_

G Score – B Score = \_\_\_\_\_

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**BRINGING OPTIMISM TO THE CLASSROOM WORKSHEET:  
INCORPORATING REFUTATIONAL LANGUAGE  
INTO PROFESSOR SPEECH**

**PART A, CHALLENGING PESSIMISM**

*“Optimism is essential to achievement and is also the  
foundation of courage and true progress.”  
-- Nicholas Murray Butler*

For each of the six statements, provide a refutation using Cognitive Optimism:

1. “When I study, I always struggle with the Rule Against Perpetuities. I will never master it.”

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2. “Every one of my professors makes things more difficult by ‘hiding the ball’ during class discussions. My friends in other section don’t have professors who do that.”

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3. "I am just not logical enough to make learning the law easy."

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4. "I know law school is one of the hardest things in the world to do. I am not going to expect too much of myself. If I can get through and graduate, that will be enough for me."

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5. "I am just not very smart. Law school will always be a struggle for me."

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6. “The people who are naturally good at law school just have some kind of advantage. Either they are innately logical, or they were exposed to this material before. I feel like I am too far behind to ever catch up to them.”

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PART B, INCORPORATING GROWTH LANGUAGE

*“Optimism doesn’t wait on facts. It deals with prospects. Pessimism is a waste of time.”  
-- Norman Cousins*

For each of the above statements, modify your refutation to include growth language.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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5. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**CREATING YOUR OWN DIALOG:  
USING THE LANGUAGE OF COGNITIVE OPTIMISM IN REAL TIME**

*“Be careful what you water your dreams with. Water them with worry and fear and you will produce weeds that choke the life from your dream. Water them with optimism and solutions and you will cultivate success. Always be on the lookout for ways to turn a problem into an opportunity for success. Always be on the lookout for ways to nurture your dream.”*

*-- Lao Tzu*

**Part I, Directions:** Find your partner. Decide who will first play the pessimistic student and who will first play the professor. Develop a dialog. The pessimistic student is to develop pessimistic statements that reflect on his or her academic experience. The professor is to refute those statements using the language of Cognitive Optimism. Feel free to engage in a lively conversation that covers many different topics. Write your favorite pessimistic student statement and professor refutation in the space provided below.

**Pessimistic Student Statement (A):**

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**Professor Refutation (A):**

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**Part II, Directions:** Now, reverse your roles. Again, feel free to engage in a lively dialog covering many topics. Write your favorite pessimistic student statement and professor refutation in the space provided below.

**Pessimistic Student Statement (B):**

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**Professor Refutation (B):**

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