



LWI LIVES

Page 1

Volume VI Issue III

February 2020

In this issue:

Profiles	Page
Tiffany Atkins	1-4
Betsy Brand Six	1, 5-6
LWI Lives Committee	7

LWI Lives is a regular electronic publication of the “Faces of LWI” Committee, which explores and communicates the emerging identity of LWI and its members. We have in common the commitment to being the best legal writing professors that we can be. But we are multi-dimensional people with different strengths, interests, curiosities, and gifts. By profiling individuals in our community, we hope to expand and develop our understanding of who we are and what we aspire to be.

Tiffany Atkins: Using Her Path to Help Students Find Theirs



By Dyane O’Leary

Tiffany Atkins is in her first year as an Assistant Professor of Law. Among her duties at Elon University School of Law in Greensboro, North Carolina, she already lists faculty advisor to the BLSA student group, facilitator of a PALS student group (Parents Attending Law School), and organizer of (and participant in!) a recent poetry “SLAM” to celebrate national writing day.

(Continued on page 2)

Contributors to this Edition:

Dyane O’Leary
Rebecca Rich
Nancy Soonpaa

Betsy Brand Six: Life is a Puzzle, But the Pieces All Fit Together!



By Nancy Soonpaa

Betsy Brand Six loves puzzles—jigsaw puzzles, logic puzzles, LSAT logic questions, escape rooms, Nancy Drew video games. She also loves a good challenge—whether in the form of a puzzle to be solved, a mountain to be climbed, or a student to be taught.

(Continued on page 5)

Tiffany Atkins

(Continued from page 1)



Raised in the heart of Washington, D.C., during the height of the crack epidemic of the early 1980s, Tiffany was no stranger to violence and poverty. But it was this exposure to people in need that set her on the path to finding her voice to help and inspire others to find theirs.

Washington, D.C., was Tiffany's first home, one that provided tough life lessons that shaped her from an early age as she steered toward safer schools and select educational programs. Looking back, Tiffany credits her extraordinary mom with moving her in the right direction; she was a single parent who worked in human resources and exposed Tiffany to what it meant to have a professional career. She brought young Tiffany along with her to conferences and meetings in states such as California, New York, and Colorado, showing her places beyond D.C. that Tiffany wouldn't have otherwise seen and planting the early seeds of work ethic.



Tiffany and her mom

The apple didn't far fall from the tree. Tiffany's mother channeled her own drive to succeed into Tiffany, enrolling her at a private grade school that would provide the best opportunities not only to learn but to grow her confidence and channel her own voice into speaking for others. And that's just what she did. Tiffany's middle name, Nicole, means "victory of the people," and according to her mother, that was no accident. Indeed, in 1989 at the ripe old age of 7, Tiffany took it upon herself to write a letter to then-president George H.W. Bush about an issue involving tax incentives at her school—even receiving a written response! Beyond thriving with new educational opportunities in grade school, Tiffany also began to fall in love with expressing her voice through poetry, a passion that continues today. She wrote her first poem at age 7 and read it at her great-grandmother's funeral.



Performing at a poetry slam

Tiffany mentions the *Cosby* Show parents as early professional role models in addition to her mother, so it's no surprise that she first tried on "Dr. Tiffany" for size—but it didn't quite fit. She developed an interest in science and medicine at The School Without Walls, a college-prep magnet high school on the campus of George Washington University. After completing a summer program at Howard University's Medical School paired with a doctor, Tiffany decided anatomy wasn't her cup of tea. She wanted something more. Something different.

Tiffany made her way to North Carolina in 1999 and attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. D.C. would always be her hometown, but North Carolina was a close second place. As a child, Tiffany often spent summers there with her father and enjoyed extended family reunions in the green outdoors. That pull away from D.C. down Interstate 95 was strong, and North Carolina became Tiffany's new home and continues to be today.

Tiffany's transition to college life in Greensboro was bumpy at first, but she found her way. Issues relating to race and culture had always piqued her interest, and North Carolina brought a new set of adjustments for this self-described "activist." She continued to look for leadership opportunities and ways to keep her voice heard, from writing op-eds in the college newspaper to writing and performing her poetry at open mic events. While juggling

different jobs, Tiffany served as vice president of the campus NAACP chapter and became involved with diversity initiatives and cultural events at UNC Greensboro, where she double majored in Political Science and African-American Studies. The biggest speed bump came in 2002 with the sudden death of her father at age 42. Her strong grades took a dive, she dropped down to a part-time program, and she was close to dropping out of college altogether before therapy helped her find hope for better times to come.

One of Tiffany's favorite books is "Failing Forward" by John C. Maxwell, and that's just what she did upon graduating college in 2003. She began work as an administrative assistant at the college and enrolled in graduate classes to consider a Master of Public Administration degree. She soon decided on a different path and set her sights on the ultimate place to learn how to use her voice for others: law school. In 2008, she joined the third class at Elon University School of Law.

Tiffany found her groove as a law student and writer at Elon, but only after early 1L struggles. As she had always done, she picked herself back up, self-diagnosed her weaknesses, and re-committed to the Elon community, getting involved in BLSA, moot court, etc. Her academic focus on litigation and public interest resulted in internships at the Greensboro Legal Aid office, and she sought out opportunities to write, working as a student contributor in Elon's marketing department where she penned articles for the school's website. After graduating in 2011, when she was the recipient of the David Gergen Award for Leadership & Professionalism at Elon, she became a staff attorney at Legal Aid of North Carolina, working on a range of matters across 6 counties including domestic violence, public housing, educational justice, and general family law. Tiffany fell in love with the direct impact she could have on clients most in need, but the emotional toll of using her voice to help others access an often-imperfect justice system was great. After 5 years, Tiffany was ready to move on and help a new group of people—students—in her next career challenge.

That challenge was teaching, which Tiffany describes as a "breath of fresh air." Late in her tenure as a legal aid attorney, Tiffany was asked to teach a Race and the Law undergraduate class at UNC Greensboro. Taking that leap was the first step in a life-changing shift. She fell in love with transferring knowledge and instilling confidence—that moment when you realize students just "get it" and learn to trust their own voice, and it's because of you. The opportunity to blend her passion for culture and current events with tricky doctrinal basics like strict scrutiny opened Tiffany's eyes to a new way to serve others, in a new professional track.

And off she took on that track. Sped, really, flattening the sparks of lingering self-doubt and hesitation. She didn't come from a long line of lawyers in her family. She didn't have a fancy Ivy League degree or perfect academic credentials. But soon she started a two-year Legal Methods & Communication teaching fellowship at Elon and hasn't looked back. Supported by mentors who were also Black women in the academy as well as other professors at Elon and at Wake Forest University School of Law, where she spent 2018-19 as a Visiting Assistant Professor, Tiffany started as a full-time professor at Elon in the summer of 2019 and teaches



Tiffany in 2019 giving the keynote speech at Elon's annual Donning of the Kente Ceremony honoring students' African heritage

Tiffany Atkins

(Continued from page 3)



Intro to Legal Studies, Legal Method & Communication I, II, and III, and Public Interest Legal Writing (with Race Law on the horizon, too!).

Apart from teaching, Tiffany has started to reconnect to her performance poetry since she lost touch with that creative outlet as a busy law student and lawyer. Writing and performing a poem “live” connects to many themes Tiffany discusses with her students: vulnerability but power in communication, emotional connection to audience, eye contact, confidence, etc. Tiffany’s organization of and participation in Elon’s poetry “SLAM” this fall just might become an annual event and yet another way Tiffany will continue to hone her voice and message to students on both a professional and personal level.

Tiffany’s passion to help students fall forward from failure and frustration and life’s many obstacles is contagious. I can only imagine the genuineness in her conversations with students, weaving her personal hurdles into lessons of grit and growth in and out of the classroom. She’s embraced a strategy aimed at amplifying minority voices: creating inclusive learning environments where students are comfortable and supported in finding their own voices. (Readers can learn more about Tiffany’s techniques in her 2018 LWI Second Draft article!) Even today, as she navigates a new world of faculty service and scholarship demands (Tiffany was awarded a 2019 LWI/ALWD Scholarship grant for a forthcoming article on GenZ and legal education), Tiffany admits to still wondering whether she’s an imposter in the legal academy, or whether the academy is simply changing and finding new voices and diversifying for the better in a slow but sure way. But for now, being a transparent part of that change in front of students’ eyes is not much different than performing one’s own poem: exhausting yet exhilarating.

To get in touch with Tiffany, you can contact her at tatkings2@elon.edu.



In addition to teaching and leading poetry slams, Tiffany is parent to a teenage step-daughter, Zymeia; a 6-year-old son, Ellington; and a 2-year-old daughter, Naima. Tiffany’s husband, Luguzy, is a musician, and their children have music-inspired names!

Betsy Brand Six

(Continued from page 1)

Professor Six has taught at the University of Kansas School of Law since 2004, when she transitioned from environmental law practice to part-time teaching, in part due to four major puzzle pieces in her life: her four children. An article about her in her local paper described that decision: she needed the flexibility of a part-time job (albeit one that she devoted closer to full-time hours), and she felt that the puzzle pieces of work and family fit together better when teaching than when practicing law. So she gave up the puzzle of environmental practice and traded it for the puzzle of law students, legal writing, and academic support.

Six recounts going on the market, finding the available position at KU, and getting the offer. After a short time, she recalls thinking “How did I practice for 13 years? Why didn’t I do this sooner? This is my true calling!” Another puzzle piece had fallen into place.

Her excitement at going to work was fueled in part by her insight into her own personality: “I like knowing more than someone else.” In law practice, particularly environmental law practice, she admits to often feeling as if she didn’t know anything—which was both unsettling and challenging in a way that she didn’t particularly enjoy. The challenges of teaching are much more to her liking.

She enjoys puzzling out how to reach every student in a classroom. She observes that it’s easy to teach some students, but it’s the struggling students who present more of a challenge. Reaching them results in a better education for everyone, because making the learning process transparent helps everyone in the classroom. She also loves puzzling out her students because she learns from them, and when she identifies what led them astray, she can anticipate those challenges and forestall them in the future.

One challenge that she recently addressed was the ratcheting-up stress level of her students as the due date of their memo approached. She talked to her students about stress management, and their grateful response was to applaud her at the end. She acknowledges that their stress could have been exacerbated by her choice to use “an interesting media law problem,” rather than the typical boring problems that she usually drafts. She “knew it was too hard,” but enjoyed helping them puzzle through the deep research necessary to develop their counter-arguments. She supported them along the way with a checking-in, preliminary email to be sure that each student was on the right track. (She acknowledges that the challenge of figuring out how to grade a memo that contains a well-executed analysis of the wrong rule is not one that she particularly enjoys.)

While Six says that she hasn’t seen major changes in her KU students since she started teaching, she does concede that they are not as self-sufficient as they used to be—“needier” is the term that she uses. However, she also believes that she might just be better at identifying their needs or they might be better at expressing them—or that perhaps their being able to express their anxiety actually heightens it. Another puzzle to figure out.

The puzzles continue at home, with kids ranging from 21 to 14—as she puts it, “lots of teenagers.” She recalls a moment



Betsy and some of her students after a successful escape room adventure

Betsy Brand Six

(Continued from page 5)

when her teaching life and mom life overlapped, when one of her sons let her read an assignment of his. She asked him what a convoluted sentence meant, and he replied, “I don’t know, but my teacher’s gonna love it.” (And sadly, the teacher did!) She always recalls that anecdote because it helps her to be a better teacher herself: her students were taught to write before law school, and they were taught to write in a way different from how law students are taught. She admits that she had forgotten how she was taught to write because she wrote as a lawyer for 13 years before she started teaching writing.

With a husband in private practice and four kids, she both learns from and is accused of lecturing them frequently. They enjoy spending time as a family outdoors, frequently travelling to their vacation home in Colorado to ski and hike. They spend time at their cabin every summer, visiting their favorite mountain in Rocky Mountain National Park. Their favorite hike is to Sky Pond, so named because as a glacial pond above the tree line, it reflects the sky. As they hike and explore, the family meets the challenges of the mountain together.

Betsy also loves and is “really good at puzzles.” She says that no one else enjoys jigsaw puzzles like she does—she will set up and do one all by herself. She explains that she does them all by herself because she is *too* good for the rest of her family to keep up with her—“Mom’s too much competition!” she jokes. On the other hand, she recalls how much her family enjoyed Nancy Drew video games together and admits that she is still a “huge fan” of them. In fact, her kids recently alerted her to a new Nancy Drew video game that was coming out before Christmas!

Betsy extends and shares her love of puzzles with her students. KU Law holds a fundraiser for a local shelter, and the legal writing faculty’s auction item is a trip to a local break-out room. In addition to promising the students a challenging time as they solve the puzzle, she also promises them that she will get them out at the end.



Climbing with Lake Odessa in the background

That promise to her students—to lead them successfully through a challenging puzzle—has been demonstrated as she works in the specialties of both legal writing and academic support and their related professional associations (she has just finished a multi-year stint on the board of the Association for Academic Support Educators—“AASE”). She sees the “tremendous synergies between academic support and legal writing,” and particularly likes how academic support pushes her to “think about the whole student, not just the product that they produce.” The flaws that she may bemoan as a grader of written product are a challenge to her as a provider of academic support, as she puzzles out what else might be happening in a student’s life that is affecting the student’s ability to perform.

At the end of her day working out the professionally challenging puzzle that is legal education and law students, she returns home to the joyfully challenging puzzle that is husband and family. With her supportive husband Steve often cooking dinner and the challenges of parenting teenagers (two down, two to go!) awaiting her, she recognizes that so “much is out of [her] control.” And the frightening, interesting, challenging, exciting puzzle of her professional and personal lives excites, energizes, and entertains her each day.

To get in touch with Betsy, you can contact her at bsix@ku.edu.



Betsy at Sky Pond

UPCOMING LEGAL WRITING EVENTS

**Rocky Mountain Legal
Writing Conference**
University of Arizona
March 13-14, 2020

Beyond the First Year
Northwestern University
April 3-4, 2020

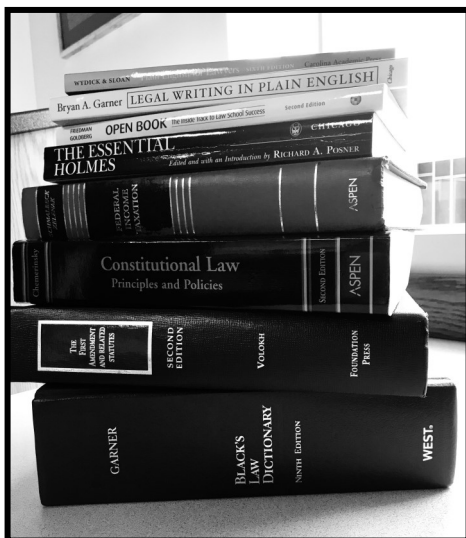
**20th Biennial Conference,
Rhetoric Society of America**
Portland, OR
May 21-24, 2020

Synergies & Scholarship
University of Oregon
June 8-9, 2020

LWI Biennial Conference
Georgetown University
July 15-18, 2020

Check out these websites for more information on what's happening!

<http://www.lwionline.org/>
<http://www.alwd.org/>
<http://www.aals.org/aals-events/>



LWI Lives Selection Process

The LWI Lives Committee is organized into three teams, and each team is responsible for selecting, proposing, and writing the profiles in each issue. To ensure a diverse newsletter, teams propose individual names to the Co-Chairs, and the Co-Chairs review the suggestions to ensure a wide range of coverage over time.

If you have someone in mind who we should put on the list for a future newsletter, please feel free to email any of the committee members listed below. If you could include a note explaining why you think the individual's profile would be particularly interesting, it will help us in developing priorities.

Committee Members



Grace Hum
Co-Chair, UC Hastings
humgrace@uchastings.edu



Rebecca Rich
Co-Chair, Duke
rich@law.duke.edu



Joan Rocklin
Co-Chair, Oregon
jrocklin@uoregon.edu



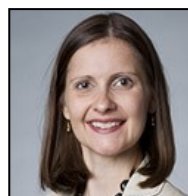
Cindy Archer
Loyola, LA
cindy.archer@lsu.edu



Elizabeth Berenguer
Campbell
berenguer@campbell.edu



Alexa Chew
UNC
achew@email.unc.edu



Whitney Heard
Houston
wwheard@central.uh.edu



Jody Marcucci
DePaul
jmarcucci@depaul.edu



Brooke Ellinwood McDonough
George Washington
bellinwood@law.gw.edu



Dyane O'Leary
Suffolk
dloleary2@suffolk.edu



Allison Ortlieb
DePaul
aortlieb@depaul.edu



Nancy Soonpaa
Texas Tech
nancy.soonpaa@ttu.edu

