

# Putting Students First: Engaging Students in Teaching White Collar Crime

Sandra D. Jordan\*

I prosecuted white collar crime as a federal prosecutor, and I have taught the subject for many years. On some occasions, I am able to teach this as a seminar with a smaller group of students, perhaps twenty or so. In my opinion, the seminar or small class forum is the ideal way to engage students in this subject, because there is more opportunity for depth of coverage and engagement. On most occasions this upper level subject is taught as a survey course with anywhere from forty-five to seventy students. I realize that the larger sized classes are not ideal, but sometimes one cannot control the size of the class.

My comments here will focus on teaching to a large section, which often presents the most challenges. Invariably some students are not as engaged as others. These are the students who believe that they can melt into the back of the classroom with minimal participation. In addition, with a large class most professors must administer a final exam. While a final exam is the norm in many law schools, and the “easiest” format to grade, we are always trying new approaches to evaluating our students outside of the traditional final and mid-term examinations.

During my most recent semester I incorporated several new approaches in this large class. I taught from my casebook,<sup>1</sup> using most of the traditional teaching methods: PowerPoint; lectures; small group discussions; and cold calling. I also utilized the technology available to enhance the learning experience via “D2L,” a classroom platform that allows the students to engage outside of the classroom and keep current with upcoming assignments. I also used ElluminateLive, a live online classroom.

The newest additions to my teaching pedagogy are student-created PowerPoint, Prezi, and GoAnimate presentations, and flipping the classroom with student-led problems. I will describe how I used each of these to supplement the White Collar Crime course.

## I. POWERPOINT, PREZI, AND GOANIMATE

Most of us are familiar with PowerPoint and its use in the classroom. In addition to PowerPoint, Prezi and GoAnimate presented an opportunity for

---

\* Professor of Law, Charlotte School of Law

<sup>1</sup> J. KELLY STRADER & SANDRA D. JORDAN, *WHITE COLLAR CRIME: CASES, MATERIALS, AND PROBLEMS* (2d ed. 2009).

interested students to take a current case in the news and construct an interactive presentation for the class. The students chose a case in the book or an event in the current news cycle. The focus ranged from a concluded case, criminal allegations, or an investigation at its inception. Some of the more interesting presentations were student-created hypotheticals. The class was encouraged to use video, photos, news clips, and other multimedia to enrich their work. They were told to present the facts in an interesting way, outline the laws involved in the conduct, post hypothetical questions on a discrete aspect of the case, and pose a resolution. I found that the students eagerly volunteered for this optional class assignment, and that the other students in the class were very attentive while the presenter was “on.” The class asked questions, suggested different outcomes, and made suggestions on how the government or defense could proceed with the theory of the case. If time did not permit in-class presentations, the material was uploaded to the D2L site.

Using Prezi<sup>2</sup> was even richer than PowerPoint, in my opinion. A Prezi allowed for the presenter to use the entire Prezi canvas as a work area rather than a slide-by-slide format as in PowerPoint, and to incorporate multimedia and visual effects more dramatically. As an example, I constructed a Prezi for a community discussion at the local performing arts center about white collar crime focused on the infamous white collar criminal Frank Abagnale, Jr.<sup>3</sup> Because Abagnale committed his crimes across the globe, the Prezi allowed for a visual depiction of the many places where Abagnale posed as a pilot, lawyer, and pediatrician while defrauding banks out of \$2.5 million dollars before he reached the age of twenty-one. Prezi is already familiar to many students, and the learning curve is forgiving for professors new to the platform.

Goanimate<sup>4</sup> is a fun way to integrate learning into a white collar crimes classroom and lends itself to incorporating humor into your class. This platform allowed students to create an animation using a current case in the casebook, an interesting investigation in the news, or a recent headline. Students constructed the animations, presented them to the class, and posed questions. Ethical issues were easily incorporated into these animations because they allowed for pause, reflection, and response. If the animation raised the interaction between the attorney and client concerning the underlying conduct, students paused to ask the class, “What would you do as counsel for this client?” or “What should the

---

<sup>2</sup> PREZI, <http://prezi.com> (last visited Jan. 29, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> It can be viewed here: <http://prezi.com/fn6k9nyasip/catch-me-if-you-can/>. Frank Abagnale, Jr. engaged in a multi-continent crime spree in the late 1960s to early 1970s while he was still under the age of twenty-one. His story is featured in the movie and Broadway musical, “Catch Me If You Can.” I presented at the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center to familiarize the season ticket holders with the subject of white collar crime, the life and crimes of Abagnale, and the upcoming musical.

<sup>4</sup> GOANIMATE, <http://goanimate.com/> (last visited Jan. 29, 2014).

government attorney focus on given this evidence?" The students made these as challenging or fun as the assignment permits.<sup>5</sup>

The end-of-year student evaluations reflected their appreciation for these types of opportunities, whether for optional extra credit, graded assignment, or additional learning experiences. Members of the class reported to me that they became much more involved in the material as a result of constructing a PowerPoint, Prezi, or GoAnimate presentation for extra credit.

## II. SMALL GROUP PROBLEMS: FLIPPED CLASS EXPERIENCE

There has been a lot of talk about flipping the classroom in the academic media.<sup>6</sup> Scholars are debating its value for student learning, and the flipped classroom is becoming more popular in law schools. I have created a limited, modified, flipped exercise in my white collar crimes class in the following way.

As we moved through the chapters in the casebook, we often had more problems that we could cover in each chapter. One way to resolve this was to flip a portion of the class by breaking the class into small groups of four to six random students. For example, I advised the class that during the next class session they would lead the discussion of the casebook problems. Rather than spend class time on the readings, all students were required to dissect the material and to familiarize themselves with the problems, without knowing which problem they would be assigned. I then "flipped" the class by using the groups to deconstruct a hypothetical problem in the book. The group was given fifteen minutes or so to discuss the issues raised by their problem. One person from the group then came to the front of the class to discuss the problem and the group's proposed outcome. The remainder of the class was then invited to disagree, ask questions, or pose additional resolutions. Once this group was finished, the next group was up. They used the board or overhead projector to explore the topic in more depth. In a class of eighty minutes, we could complete about five problems. The next time we had a flipped class day, I made sure that the group affiliations were shuffled.<sup>7</sup> I kept track of which students previously presented, and made sure that every student had the opportunity to lead the discussion in front of the class.

Using these exercises I found that the students were avid listeners when their colleagues were at the podium. They not only paid attention, but the presenter realized that they might not be as good at explaining the material as they thought. The presenter was able to improve his or her oral communication skills and focus his or her time on the key issues. In addition, the presenter's group comrades

---

<sup>5</sup> A quick scenario involving insider trading produced by one of my students demonstrates the medium: <http://goanimate.com/videos/0zIw5IcKdBqg>.

<sup>6</sup> There are many variations to the flipped classroom, but a general definition can be found here: *Flipping the Classroom*, THE ECONOMIST (Sept. 17, 2011), <http://www.economist.com/node/21529062>.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, I could have pre-assigned the groups, but I prefer to shuffle them so that the students get used to working with people they may not know well.

chimed in with additional thoughts and pointed out where there was group disagreement. The shy student spoke. The confident student found out that they did not really know the material when their classmates posed questions. Peer-generated questions were not as threatening as those coming from the professor. As a result, the class was engaged in a different way and they reported to me that it was a beneficial learning experience. Students wanted to continue to deconstruct the problems throughout the course.

### III. CONCLUSION

Each of these methods for teaching White Collar Crime worked for me this past semester. I found that the students loved the various approaches and that they especially liked taking the lead in front of their colleagues. The inclusion of a variety of teaching methodologies allowed me to better assess my individual students, and it gave the students an opportunity to develop their skills at oral presentation. Everyone presented to the class and worked within their groups. Moreover, the pedagogical value was evident as the students were able to delve deeper into the subject matter. All of these suggested teaching approaches work well with large classes. It was all just a matter of getting the future lawyers invested in their own learning.