

OPENING REMARKS

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Welcome to Emory University School of Law's Seventh Biennial Conference on the teaching of transactional law and skills. Thank you for being here on Zoom to help us explore our theme—Emerging from the Crisis: The Future of Transactional Law and Skills Education. In preparation for this conference, I've been reading everything I can get my hands on about the pandemic's effect on education in general and legal education in particular. I've been looking for answers. During the pandemic, I missed my "normal" work life. In fact, I said over and over again "I can't wait for things to get back to normal." Now, however, I'm nervous about returning to the office and teaching in person again. In fact, I'm nervous about "normal."

Kevin Martin Antshel, a professor of psychology at Syracuse University, calls this feeling "anxiety of the unknown."¹ As University of California San Francisco psychology professor Elissa Epel explains: "Many people feel disoriented because we are not here or there, we are on the bridge to a different future full of unknowns."² So, as we emerge from the pandemic, what do we carry with us, aside from lingering grief and loss? How will we have grown through adversity? As Stanford psychologist Jamil Zaki has said: "If a building is toppled by an earthquake, we probably wouldn't reconstruct exactly what was there before. . . . We build back better."³ I want to build back better.

So, I ask myself questions about what I can carry into my classroom:

- What technology will I be able to continue using effectively?
 - Breakout rooms? Polling? Other?
- Can I replicate the good parts of my online persona?
 - I was more animated, more performative, and more concerned about student engagement.
- Should I continue to assign a grade for class participation?

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¹ Joshua Bote, *Why It Will Be So Hard to Transition Back to 'Normal' Life After the Pandemic*, SFGATE (May 14, 2021, 4:07 PM), <https://www.sfgate.com/coronavirus/article/COVID-mental-health-recovery-UCSF-anxiety-16175185.php>.

² *Id.*

³ Melissa De Witte, *Hitting the Reset Button: Stanford Psychologist Says We Can Build a Better Normal After the Pandemic*, STAN. NEWS (Mar. 22, 2021), <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/03/22/hitting-reset-button-building-better-normal-pandemic>.

- When their cameras were on, I became very aware of the seriously distressed faces of the more introverted students when I called on them.
- Will I feel as connected to my students when they don't get to Zoom into my home office (or hear my dogs barking) and I don't get to see their cats curl around their shoulders?
- Are we still preparing our students to hit the ground running as transactional attorneys, or are there new things we need to teach them in order to address the ways that the work lives of transactional attorneys have changed?
- How will our students be feeling post-pandemic? Will I remember to be compassionate with them and with myself as we all reenter the world?

These are just some of the questions that are swirling around in my head as I prepare to return to “normal,” which actually seems a bit like facing the great unknown. Today, I look forward to hearing from our keynote speakers and from all of you as well. Let's share what we have learned and give some collective thought to what we will carry into the next academic year.