Presentation Skills

I. Guest Speakers
A. General observation: all “talking heads” who spoke, generally without interruption for questions or discussion. [Consider: was this optimal? Suggestions for the future?]
B. What made for effective presentations:
1. Relevant topics with useful information. Where underlying content is complicated, supporting Powerpoint or hand-outs demonstrate application.
2. Passion for the topic: bring to life, in balanced way, issues the speaker considers important.
3. Speakers about professional lives: balanced presentation (inspirational to audience about positive; candid about downside); aids credibility.
4. Focused, prepared, articulate. Use of roadmaps; clarity in topics to be addressed.
5. Use of “war stories” to make substantive points.
6. Good use of time.

II. Student Presentations
A. In-Class & Law Firm Group Presentations
1. Formats
   a. Game shows (Jeopardy, Trivial Pursuit, Family Feud.
      (1) Advantages: engages participants’ competitive spirit; entertaining way to present information.
      (2) Risks: sound bytes may not be most effective way to deliver complex information in ways that audience can distill and understand; can be expensive; fairness concerns.
      (3) Ideas for future: announce game rules and substantive focus in advance, so students can realistically focus their reading and listening; develop transparent, even-handed game rules and procedures so no team trounces the others; shape game questions to reflect and reinforce important substantive content; structure so everyone goes away feeling positive. Before presentation do run-through that trouble-shoots potential problems; make sure technology or other mechanics work. Helpful to run through with outsider not involved in planning.
   b. Skits, role plays
      (1) Advantages: careful drafting permits controlled way to focus attention on content; entertaining but substantively directed, prompting thoughtful reflection and focused discussion.
      (2) Risks: if not carefully vetted beforehand, questions posed

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may be too broad, ambitious or unfocused.

(3) Ideas for future: narrow focus with precise questions distributed in advance to audience (either before or at start of presentation); helps direct their attention

c. Talking heads, with either question and answer, discussion questions, or break-out groups and reporting back for group discussion

(1) Advantages: effective way to deliver complex content (with verbal/visual presentation simpler and more focused than written content for audience to take away); thought-provoking; hands-on or experiential learning,

(2) Risks: can be boring with disengaged audience; equipment failures; sensory overload [visual and audio].

(3) Ideas for future: plan ahead [timing, complexity, advance notice of focus with roadmap and precise questions; back-up plans for Murphy].

(a) Dry run on technology, with support staff involved; screen shots of key steps; hand-out with Power Points and space for taking notes.

(b) Make sure that hypotheticals or discussion questions are sufficiently precise that time allows for meaningful consideration by audience, with summations by presenters.

(c) Careful planning for use of space, taking into account noise level; designated reporter for groups to report back and sufficient time for overall group discussion.

B. Individual Presentations

1. Formats: storytelling, with visual aids and Q&A or discussion questions.

a. Advantages: opportunity to discuss topic in depth. Engage audience with brief compelling story or videos; used to focus attention on legal issues presented and forecast how they should be addressed.

b. Risks in storytelling: long, complex factual recitation could take up time that might be better spent focusing on the legal issues presented here, and in larger legal context.

c. Risks in videos (commercials, movies, television shows): similar; takes so long in setting up the problem, or in surveying the different depictions, that leaves little time to address current law and normative questions about what is permissible. Entertainment value could overtake substantive content.

d. Risks in talking head presentation with Q & A or discussion questions: audience might get bored and tune out.

2. Techniques: Focus on how to engage audience interest, present compelling scenerio as backdrop for law; stimulate in-depth, quality discussion on specific questions.

3. Ideas for future (“If we knew then, what we now know . . .”)
a. Put the story or entertainment visuals in context; balance with content.
b. Perhaps have carefully drafted hypothetical problem that presents narrow questions the audience will be asked to discuss; distribute in advance of presentation with assignment for audience to read and think about while reading paper.
c. Perhaps distribute in advance precise discussion questions that audience is asked to think about while reading paper.

C. Other general ideas:
1. In advance of every student presentation, the presenter would distribute a short thesis statement of the paper, with two or three key points and supporting citation. Expected length: one paragraph. These could be compiled into a quick reference notebook on the topics addressed in the class, and available for later reference.
2. When using break-out groups: assign a specific task to each, with a designated spokesperson to report to entire class. Make sure there is time allowed for reporting back and then general class discussion.
3. Once again: Plan ahead, figure out technology, carefully allocate time, trouble-shoot, narrow focus and have back-ups in place. Consider acoustics and issues relating to specific location. Before presentation: focus attention on where you want audience involvement; focus on specific questions.
4. During presentation: deep breath; slow down; eye contact; if Powerpoint or videos – turn off first row of lights. Be patient with audience in allowing time to think, process and discuss. Be willing to relinquish control if Smile, or be otherwise personally engaged. Have fun.