

Suggestions for the Improvement of Teaching International Law in Asia

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I am proceeding with the belief that international law matters, and that it has a pertinent role to play in the world affairs and could offer potential solutions to the ever growing global problems. There needs to be a premise that the study of international law matters to actually make the study of the subject better. In my past interactions with students from Nepal and India, I often find them recollect their induction into international law with a caveat from their professors about how international law is a failure. The consequence of such a negative premise is an inevitable disinterest in the subject. My study of Public International Law was thankfully different as my teacher started the course with the fact that international law matters. The success of international law overpowers the occasional yet sensationalised failures, while conveniently overlooking the everyday success. Absolute compliance with a legal system can never be a metric for gauging its efficacy, and this reality applies equally to all the domestic legal systems across the world as it does to international law.

Developing the Idea that International Law Matters

A misconception amongst students relegates the relevance of international law only to diplomats and international law scholars. Clearing the air, the study of international law is about the people with real world problems, that is all of us, and every single one of us. History is replete with instances where the international legal framework has been influenced by events that affect us, such as the strengthening of global anti-terrorism laws post the ominous 9/11 attacks. Starting the syllabus of international law with a discussion of the importance and applicability of the subject could make the students more receptive to the material built upon such foundation. This would make the students acknowledge the importance of international law. The study of a subject could become more meaningful and interesting if what has been taught can be applied. As such, the use of hypothetical situations as an exercise for the class to engage in can provide them with an opportunity to work and apply what they have learned.

Teaching and Researching go Hand in Hand

Some amount of time needs to be devoted to teaching the tools and techniques required to research international legal issues. While online databases such as WestLaw and Elsevier can

help develop these skills, the students need to be able to access treaties, acts, resolutions, major journals, books, judgements, etc. There needs to be dedicated lessons to equip the students. While some law schools have library orientations which help the students in receiving limited guidance on accessing electronic databases, journals, etc., it is typically restricted to the traditional legal research of the respective legal system. In conjunction with the library orientation there could be an orientation on methods to access international legal material. Additionally, it could be helpful to provide the students with a list of websites, journals, books, etc. as part of the international law course syllabus.

The Course Should be Graded on Several Parameters

To determine a student's performance in the course a variety of factors must be accounted. This may include a combination of a writing assignments, class participation, examinations, etc. There are various methods/techniques that can be adopted to test the students' knowledge in exams. Basing questions on hypothetical scenarios, testing the students' ability to identify issues, and testing the conceptual knowledge of the students through multiple choice questions and essay questions can be a range of methods used during exams.

A written assignment can also be an important method to determine the students' performance. The level of research required to identify a thesis, analyse and integrate facts and scholarly work, helps build the base of international legal scholarship. To further ensure a productive output, the students should submit their paper topic, thesis, and a brief outline for pre-approval. Basing the performance of the students on all of these parameters will not only test their knowledge of the subject area but also their critical thinking skills and their ability to articulate ideas.

The Concept of a Teaching Assistant

To increase the class participation of each student, the concept of a teaching assistant should be introduced in every law school. Giving an opportunity to a senior student to become a teaching assistant helps both that particular senior and their international law students. A teaching assistant's usual class size should be limited to 10-12 students at a time to ensure greater interaction and understanding *inter se*. They would deal with particular issues or revise what has already been done in class by the teacher. In my experience, a teaching assistant helps

in explaining complicated legal concepts by breaking them down and making it far simpler. Since the teaching assistant is also a student they can be approached any time during the day and in my experience such teaching assistants are always available for help after class hours, when teachers may not be available. The position of a teaching assistant helps that senior hone his/her interest in this subject area and also get first-hand experience teaching and creating academic outlines.

The Challenges left after the Report of the SILS-DILA Conference on 'Teaching and Researching International Law in Asia'

Most of the challenges identified by the Report of the SILS-DILA Conference on 'Teaching and Researching International Law in Asia', have been addressed; however, there still are some challenges left. While there has been an increase in the number of conferences and seminars relating to international law and this subject has been seen to become a mandatory subject in law schools, and there has been a development of cheap teaching materials readily accessible, there still is a concern with regard to the exposure of international law in Asia. There needs to be a greater exchange between the scholars and practitioners of the regions with more focus on joint research projects. A method to increase the students' interests and give them more exposure could be to include the interested students in researches as well. The funding and incentives available in European institutes and such research work being cited in courts and in other areas is something that the Asian institutes of research should look up to. Also, with the teaching of law in some countries being in their national language and not English, there needs to be an improvement in the knowledge of English as well.