



YLS COMMITTEE MAKES NEEDED CHANGES TO BRIDGE-THE-GAP PROGRAM

Despite my former work as a journalist, being asked to write an article for the West Virginia State Bar magazine, as the Young Lawyer's Executive Committee Chair, has not been an easy task. While struggling with choosing a topic, it occurred to me that like my trepidation in writing an article, many of the accomplishments of the Young Lawyer's Section over the past year have been seemingly insurmountable. Despite adversity, however, the Young Lawyer's Section has been diligently at work and has seen several projects realized.

One such project which the Young Lawyer's Section has undertaken is revising the Bridge-the-Gap program. Many of you recall that, as a new lawyer, you are required to complete Bridge-the-Gap within six months prior to or within 12 months after

your admission to the West Virginia State Bar. For many of us, this meant sitting through a full day of lectures, or watching videos of the six hour program. In the past, Bridge-the-Gap was a "canned" program meant to provide an introduction into the practical side of practicing law. Over time, however, the program has grown outdated and in need of expanding. Recognizing the importance of Bridge-the-Gap, the Young Lawyer's Section ventured to update the program by taking advantage of technology, and by allowing the program to be adapted to suit the needs of our individual members.

Lead by Young Lawyer's Section District 12 Representative, Jasmine Morton, and with assistance from the State Bar and several attorneys throughout the state, Bridge-the-Gap underwent

a complete overhaul in the last year. Today, Bridge-the-Gap consists of video presentations on legal ethics, office management, the State Bar's programs and services, and various legal topics.

When approaching the need to revise Bridge-the-Gap, the Young Lawyer's Section Executive Committee listened closely to the suggestions, and at times, criticisms of the current program. Three issues seemed to stand out more than any others. First, the program was in need of updating. Many of the videos were several years old and did not address new revisions to the law, or videos featured past State Bar leadership. Second, the program did not relate to all members. For instance, solo practitioners and smaller firms were requesting topics that better suited their vast practice areas. Lastly, the program

needed to be more easily accessible.

With these three issues in mind, the process of updating Bridge-the-Gap began by videotaping new opening remarks by State Bar leadership, and Court personnel. Next, the Young Lawyer's Section compiled a list of legal topics which significantly expanded the program. Following approval of the expanded topics,

the Young Lawyer's Section began recruiting attorneys, who were well-versed in each topic area. These attorneys were asked to prepare and present their topic, not to a captive audience, but before a video camera.

The next step was to ensure that the program could be accessible to any member, at any time. After discussion the obvious choice was to administer Bridge-the-Gap exclusively through the Young Lawyer's Section tab on the State Bar's website. State Bar Technology and Communications Specialist, Mike Mellace, was instrumental in compiling the video presentations and setting up the website so that the program could be accessed online. Today, the new and improved Bridge-the-Gap is "live" as they say and is being utilized by our newest members.

For completion of updated Bridge-the-Gap, members must go-online, and view 210 minutes in the "Mandatory Course Section." Mandatory course topics consist of the Young Lawyer's Introduction (by Young Lawyer's Section Immediate Past-Chair Jason Pizatella), State Bar Introduction (by State Bar Immediate Past-President James Wright), State Bar Overview (by Executive Director Anita Casey), Office of Disciplinary Counsel overview (by Rachel Fletcher Cipoletti), Supreme Court of Appeals Overview (by Rory Perry), Circuit Court Overview (by Judge Jaymie Godwin Wilfong), Magistrate Court Overview (by Janie Moore), and the Family Court Overview (by Judge J. Jeffery Culpepper).

In addition to completing the Mandatory Course Section, members must also view 100 minutes in the Other Practice Areas section. This section marks

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the most significant change to Bridge-the-Gap in that, for the first time, members can choose among a wide variety of topics like, Abuse and Neglect (by Kelly Hamon), Equitable Distribution (by Mark Kelley), Domestic Relations and Bankruptcy (by Andy Nason), Family Court Overview (by Marjorie McDiarmid), Guardianship and Conservator (by

Harley Stollings), and Mediation (by Debra Scudiere).

While the YLS is proud of the evolution that Bridge-the-Gap has undergone in the last year, this program is not yet complete. New topics will continue to be added and updated videos created. The vision for Bridge-the-Gap is to create a program that can be customized by the individual member and provide the best first glimpse into the practice of law in West Virginia.

I encourage everyone to log onto the State Bar website, Young Lawyer's Section, and review the topics that are now available. If you have topic suggestions, or would like to volunteer your time to present a topic, please contact the Young Lawyer's Section of the West Virginia State Bar. We sincerely welcome your suggestions. Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not thank everyone who helped moving Bridge-the-Gap forward. This seemingly insurmountable project has been realized by the hard work of the Young Lawyer's Section Bridge-the-Gap Committee, headed by Ms. Morton, the State Bar, and the topic presenters. Thank you for your continued commitment to this important Young Lawyer's Section program.

Lastly, I am honored to be the Young Lawyer's Section Chair and look forward to continuing the growth of services that the Young Lawyer's Committee is experiencing. I want to thank our Immediate Past-Chair, Jason Pizatella, in his work over the last year. He has been gracious in assisting me in transitioning to the role of Chair, and in assuring that the important work of the Young Lawyer's Section continues. **WVLA**