

Recommendations for Using Community Resources

In every community there are many resources available to enrich law-related education classes. Use of community resources can take two forms: resource persons can be brought into the classroom or the class can take a field trip into the community. Field experiences and the use of community resource persons can provide students with a diversity of information, materials, and experience not available in any textbook.

Procedure for Using Resource Persons

1. **Select a Resource Person:** Depending on the unit of study and the goals of the class, there is an endless variety of resource persons who might be invited to the classroom. Among the most common resource persons are lawyers, law students, police officers, or people who have first-hand knowledge of the case or controversy being studied. Other possibilities include probation or parole officers, ex-offenders, real estate agents, consumer advocates, social workers, housing inspectors, elected officials, judges, journalists, and representatives of various government agencies or public interest organizations.
2. **Prepare the Speaker and the Class:** A certain amount of advance planning is usually necessary to make the best use of an outside speaker. Obviously the instructor must take care of all of the administrative details concerning the visit. Just as important, both the speaker and the class should be prepared for the visit. The resource person should be given some information on the students' background and interest in the topic of discussion. The speaker should be told the objectives of the class and should tailor his or her presentation to the students' background and the class objectives. Likewise, the class should be told how the resource person fits into the goals of their class. They should do some research on the topic of the visit and should prepare a list of questions, preferably in writing, prior to the visit.
3. **Conduct the Class:** Typically, resource persons have given a short talk or lecture on the topic of their expertise, followed by a question-and-answer session. While this is generally a good format, other ways to more effectively involve the resource person in the activities of the class include having the resource person act as a judge or witness in a mock trial, involving the speaker in a simulation game or role-play activity, having the students interview the speaker as if they were at a press conference, or having the resource person participate in a panel discussion or debate.

There are several advantages to involving a guest speaker in an activity. First, the speaker does not have to assume responsibility for class management. Second, the success of the class does not depend totally on the guest's skills as a lecturer. Finally, in the event that the speaker is unable to attend the class, a meaningful lesson will still exist.

4. **Debrief the Visit:** Just as it is important to prepare the class for the resource person, it is also important to debrief the experience. Students should be asked to evaluate the class through questions such as the following:
 - What did you learn from the speaker?
 - What else would you like to have learned?
 - How did you feel about what the speaker said and what he or she had to say?
 - How did the speaker's remarks relate to other information you have learned about the same topic?
 - In addition, speakers should be thanked and should be asked for their feedback on the class and their own experience.