

**Structure for Monthly Program Development  
for the  
William H. Stafford American Inn of Court  
Tallahassee, Florida**

**2013-2014**

The following provides a summary of the structure for monthly program development by the William H. Stafford American Inn of Court (the "Stafford Inn") located in Tallahassee, Florida. The Stafford Inn is dedicated to encouraging the creativity, interactivity, and educational impact of its programs, which are a vital component of carrying out its mission to promote the highest standards of ethics, skill and courtesy in the practice of law.

**Structure of Presenting Teams**

The Stafford Inn is divided into 10 "Pupilage" teams comprised of one judge, two Master lawyers, two Barristers, three Associates, and two Pupils (law students). The teams are assigned to promote a variety of perspectives and experience levels, and team members are expected to cross-mentor one another about various issues affecting the profession. Teams are expected to meet regularly and exchange information which furthers the mission of the Inn. Six of the teams are selected at the beginning of the year to present a program at one of the monthly general membership meetings.

**Program Scheduling**

The Stafford Inn generally schedules its six general membership meetings for the third Thursday of every month between October and May, except December. Most of the Stafford Inn's six program meetings are held at the Capital City Country Club in Tallahassee, though the Stafford Inn has also traditionally participated in a joint meeting elsewhere with one or more other Inns each year. The joint meeting has usually served as the general membership meeting for March. The Stafford Inn is currently evaluating any potential joint meeting opportunities for the upcoming year. Typically, the other inns involved in the joint meeting will coordinate with the Stafford Inn on how the joint meeting program will be structured, depending on the logistics of the event.

In addition, in lieu of a regular program meeting in December, the Stafford Inn has often conducted a holiday reception together with another local Inn. The Stafford Inn also conducts an opening banquet in September of each year which features a keynote speaker from the legal community. The most recent keynote speaker at the opening banquet was Florida's Attorney General.

The dates for the Stafford Inn's General Membership Meetings in which programs will be conducted in 2013-14 are October 17, 2013; November 21, 2013; January 16, 2014; February 20, 2014; March 27, 2014; and Thursday, April 24, 2014. The Inn

meetings begin with a social hour at 5:00, the 1-hour program starts at 6:00, and dinner begins at 7:00 at the conclusion of the program. The Pupilage teams, regardless of whether they are presenting, all sit together for each meeting. We find that the discussion prompted during the program from 6:00 to 7:00 lasts well into the dinner hour and hopefully into the other informal meetings that teams organize for themselves.

### **Topic Selection and Format of Programs**

The Stafford Inn intentionally does not assign program topics, but leaves the topic selection and development to the discretion of each individual team. Because our Pupilage teams draw from a wide variety of legal practice areas, we believe that each team can choose the most effective topic by drawing upon its particular resources, insights and experiences. We also find that the team-centric process of discussing and vetting possible topics for programs is a particularly useful way to invite the teams to engage and share insights collaboratively outside of our normal meeting times.

In identifying topics for their programs, some teams have internally developed drafts of different program ideas and even presented mini-programs just for their own team's consideration as a possible topic before making a final selection. Others have modified and fine-tuned the scope of the program as they developed it depending on what components appeared most and least effective. We believe that encouraging a flexible and dynamic process whereby teams have maximum discretion leads in the end to the most compelling programs.

Each team takes a different path to developing its program, but typically the team will meet, perhaps for lunch a couple of months before the program is scheduled, to initially discuss topics. Once the topic is selected as described above, the team will typically develop and assign roles for members who are responsible for certain components of the program or who need to perform a discrete role throughout. The teams tend to do a good job of making sure that the law students and young lawyers are having the chance to play a significant role in the program development and preparation, and therefore having the greatest opportunity to work with and learn from their team members. Of all the experiences available to members of the Stafford Inn, many members say that the close-knit collaboration within a team to produce a program is the most valuable, worthwhile and memorable part of their Inn membership.

### **Format of Programs**

The format of the Stafford Inn's 1-hour programs varies widely. Some programs involve skits, some involve significant use of slides or video presentations, some involve guest speakers or panels of speakers with significant expertise in a given topic, but most programs incorporate some or all of these formats into their program. While we have had some very effective guest-speakers in past programs, the Stafford Inn's most recent survey reflected the sense from some members that the skits and formats where the full team is involved in the presentation of the program tend to be very effective. We will

continue to encourage programs to make use of all the Pupilage Team members on the night of the presentation itself.

All of the programs encourage audience participation, questions and commentary to develop discussion on the nuanced areas raised in the program. The presenters sometimes call on particular persons or particular Pupilage teams (seated together at tables) to respond to a question, or invite volunteers from the audience. The presenters and others in the Inn are particularly effective in informally soliciting the wisdom and experience of senior members of the bar and the many members of the judiciary in attendance. We believe this level of discussion and sharing of insights is particularly useful in leveraging the expertise of the Inn's senior members into effective mentorship of its younger lawyers and law students.

### **Content of Programs**

The content of the Stafford Inn's programs also varies widely. Programs often touch on many points related to practical skills, substantive law, ethics and professionalism. Topics in the last two years were as follows:

- Academic research on the relationship between life satisfaction and the ethical and professional practice of law;
- Trends in law related to information available on the internet, including ethics, discovery practice and substantive claims arising from internet use;
- Legal changes and procedural mechanics related to eFiling in Florida's state court system;
- Jury selection and voir dire, focusing primarily on practice tips and the substantive law related to challenges;
- Judicial ethics and discipline, including discussion of substantive law, bar regulation, and related ethical issues;
- Discussion by a panel of public officials and candidates for public office in the judiciary and legal field regarding a variety of topics affecting the legal practice, ethics, professionalism and other topics affecting the legal community;
- "Civility Matters," a program on professionalism promoted by the American Inns of Court and American Board of Trial Attorneys, as modified by the presenting team;
- A program on "Good Manners: Views from the Bench," discussing several categories of practice and professionalism related to effective interactions, communications and advocacy before judges;
- Evidentiary issues related to a variety of procedural contexts, which focused mainly on practice elements, but also on ethical issues;
- A program in which a local acting troupe performed vignettes from "To Kill a Mockingbird" that raised various points of group discussion related to professionalism, ethics and legal practice;
- Attorney ethical, moral and professional behavior, involving skits testing the ethical and professional bounds faced by lawyers and judges; and
- A historical review of the Inns of Court nationally and locally and the purpose of the Inn movement, with a related discussion of ethics and professionalism;

## **Continuing Legal Education Credits**

Following each program, the Program Chair for the Stafford Inn seeks approval from the Florida Bar for Continuing Legal Education Credits so that the attending Inn members can obtain credit. Where a program's content qualifies for special credits in the fields of ethics and/or professionalism, appropriate approval is sought.

## **Guidance and Resources Available to Presenting Teams**

While the Stafford Inn's teams are encouraged not to feel confined to particular topics or formats, the Program Chair advises the teams to reach out for any assistance ranging from content selection to technical needs, and also works with each team on the night of the program to make sure that their programming needs are met.

Regardless of how effective its programs are, the Stafford Inn's leadership is continually looking for ways to improve its programs and the experience of its members and will continue to do so.