

# **Legal Design & Laboratory Models as Next-Gen Experiential Legal Education**

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My name is Dan Jackson. I direct the NuLawLab at Northeastern University School of Law. We are an interdisciplinary innovation laboratory at the School of Law that is working to merge creative arts and law, to come up with radical new forms of legal empowerment. You folks are probably familiar with the term legal empowerment, which generally refers to providing people with the tools and resources that allow them to access and activate their legal rights, regardless of their ability to hire a lawyer. You can learn all about us at [www.nulawlab.org](http://www.nulawlab.org).

So first up, the NuLawLab – let me tell you a little bit about who we are and what we're up to. First of all, we're at Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts USA. You may not be familiar with our educational model, which is radically different from everyone else's in the United States, so I'm going to give you a quick primer on that. We're 51 years old, having re-opening in 1968, after a period of time being closed. It was founded by men and women who came from traditional legal education at the time, such as Harvard Law School. Our founding faculty decided to do something radically different. There are three things that make us different from other law schools.

The first is experiential legal education. Our cooperative legal education model requires our students to complete four (4) coop placements out in the real world, working for judges, for lawyers, for prosecutors, defense attorneys, just about any law office you can think of. That means our students actually get a full year's worth of experience before they graduate. That's probably the most significant difference in our legal education model. The other two items are worth noting. One is that we teach all of our doctrinal courses through the lens of social justice and public interest. And the third thing is we do not have grades, GPA, or class rank. We have written narrative evaluations, which makes a lot of work for those of us who are teaching to write those evaluations. But what it does on the ground, it means that there's a lot less of a

competitive atmosphere among the students because they are not fighting to make it into the top 10% of the class.

The NuLawLab has been around since 2012-2013. We are, as I introduced, an interdisciplinary innovation laboratory. We're trying to merge creative arts and law. We're using structured creative processes like design thinking to tackle longstanding problems in our justice system. Design thinking refers to the application of product and system design methods outside of the field of design.

I'm going to give you a little bit of an overview. How many of you are familiar with "legal design" as a concept? Oh, more than I expected, that's actually pretty good. Still, not enough. So I'm going to give you a little bit of a global overview of legal design, as it is currently happening right now in the world, so that we can all be on the same framework. And then I'm going to talk about how we're applying it at Northeastern, in our NuLawLab with our students. And then I want to share what I think is a really exciting opportunity for us to think about laboratory models as a different way of approaching experiential learning for lawyers and law students.

In the Americas - North America, Central America, South America - legal design really is an academic pursuit. Many of you might be familiar with legal design with the work of Margaret Hagen, who runs the Legal Design Lab at Stanford Law School. But Stanford is not our only sister lab. The model is actually taking off rather nicely. In 2013, we were the first innovation laboratory among US law schools to start up as an entity with dedicated staff. By 2018, last year, there were nine (9) law school innovation labs among US law schools. That's a pretty rapid increase in the application of legal design within the academic context. In Europe, legal design has a different profile. I was just in Helsinki for the Legal Design Summit, the third iteration of it. Over 600 people attended, and it was a remarkable convening. In Europe, legal design is mostly a commercial affair, so almost everybody at the Legal Design Summit in Helsinki that hailed from Europe was engaged in practicing this emerging method in a commercial law firm or at a small legal design consultancy. And in Asia and Africa, legal design has really been practiced as a matter of grassroots efforts. Organizations such as Namati have been building things like community paralegal programmes, where non-lawyers are able to help their fellow citizens navigate legal and policy issues. Indeed, Namati's model has been a source of inspiration for the NuLawLab.

And, of course, that focus is changing a little bit in your own backyard, here with your law school's LITE Lab. I've asked Brian Tang to just tell us a few little bits about what you've just started. I think your LITE Lab and HKU is the most recent entry into the global legal innovation lab movement, would you agree with that? And Brian is going to talk more about what you're up to tomorrow. But just tell us real quickly what the LITE Lab is doing.

[Brian introducing LITE Lab]

Let me now tell you what all this creativity looks like in practice. One way that we work with our students is through our Laboratory Seminar and Applied Design and Legal Empowerment, which is a course that we teach every quarter, or four times a year. The course is an opportunity to introduce law students to product and system design methods as applied to a legal problems and institutions. This is a photograph of our typical first session when we encourage students to go back to their kindergarten days and play with colored paper and crayons to express themselves. This current quarter, which I'm in the middle of teaching right now, we are asking students to explore the world of lo-fi radio broadcasts and podcasting as a means of conveying legal empowerment content. Here is another photograph, which is their first session in the audio booth creating a recording. We're in partnership for this seminar with the School of Museum and Fine Arts across the street from us, on Huntington Avenue in Boston. You don't very often see smiles like that on law students' faces, but we actually get a lot of that at the NuLawLab, which is a pretty wonderful thing. Our laboratory seminar is the primary means through which we are teaching students to apply these design methods, as they relate to legal problems and institutions.

I want to share with you an example of an outcome from one of our seminars that was about a year ago. This will give you a better sense of the student experience. Our seminar was open to both law students and art students. We have up to eight seats for law students and an additional six seats available to students from the College of Arts, Media & Design. These are all graduate students. We asked the students to prepare materials that would be used by other law students going down to the southern border of the United States with Mexico to prepare refugees for credible fear interviews. That interview is part of the process of coming into the United States under a claim of asylum. Our law students were very activated by what was happening in terms of the policies of the Trump administration in the United States, and wanted to go down and help. So our lab seminar was set up to task our students with coming up with some

solutions. One of the things they came up with is what we call “trauma cards”, which are small cards that are visual representations of traumatic events that can be used in the credible fear interview prep process. If a refugee is having difficulty expressing him or herself, the students thought the card prompts would help them to tell their difficult story. These materials were actually used in May, 2019 down in Dilly, Texas. We collected feedback from all the students. We're now iterating another version of the cards to make them better, and will continue to make them available to law student volunteers, because it's going to continue to be a problem in terms of refugee credible fear interview prep.

I want to close on an optimistic note about why I think working with legal design and laboratory models in an iterative and creative way is a very powerful opportunity for legal educators. When we first got started with NuLawLab back in 2012-2013, people looked at me like I had three heads when I explained what we were up to (and some still do). When we explained that we were trying to merge creative arts and law to come up with new forms of legal empowerment, people asked how exactly does that work? I am a huge proponent of what I call radical inter-disciplinarity or inter-professionalism. So while I think it's great to partner up with folks in adjacent disciplines, I think there's a lot more potential if you go further and further and further from the law as possible. I'm therefore more interested in having a dialogue at our lab seminar with ceramics majors and fine art painters. And here's why: If you go way back in time to when law as a concept was first proposed, if you think about it, that's one of the most creative ideas that humankind has ever come up - the notion of a system of laws to govern our relations with each other and the state. I think that what I've learned in the years that I have been running the NuLawLab, is that law is actually a creative medium of expression. It is an opportunity for us, as educators, as law students, as any number of disciplines, to come together and to use the systems of law, to make the world a better place. I just think that's an incredibly powerful thing. I don't think we consider enough that law is an inherently creative field, and I think we should embrace that, and we should own it. And I really appreciate the opportunity to be here. Thank you very much.