

Assessment of Stone Soup Course Experience

This questionnaire is for faculty who have used a “Stone Soup” Project assignment or activity to describe and assess their experience with it. Your response will be posted on the Indisputably blog and may be disseminated in other ways as well. It would help if you would describe specifics of your experience, but do not include information that could identify any student or subject of a Stone Soup assignment or activity.

1. Faculty name: **Law**
2. School: **University of Windsor**
3. Course: **Access to Justice (A2J)**
4. Semester: **Fall 2017**
5. Number of students in the course: **26**
6. Briefly describe the Stone Soup assignment or activity (e.g., interview or focus group class). If you assigned students to conduct an interview, summarize the type of subjects and focus of the interview. If you conducted a focus group class, describe the speakers and issues discussed.

In my class, Stone Soup functioned as the students’ final assignment. They were required to first do an autoethnography to situate themselves and begin writing in a reflective way that also included reference to course materials. I introduced the Stone Soup exercise during the first week so the students would immediately begin seeking interview subjects. They were required to submit an ungraded but mandatory assignment describing their subject, the list of questions, and ethical issues (both research and practice related). They interviewed their subjects, then conducted short presentations in class. They were then required to submit a final 10 page paper covering the interview content, ethical issues, and connections to the course themes.

7. Was the assignment required, one of several options, or for extra credit?

The assignment was required.

8. If students were to write a paper, how long was the paper supposed to be (in double-spaced pages)?

The paper was supposed to be 10 pages in length. Students added their interview questions and other supporting documents in an Appendix.

9. When was the assignment due (or when did you conduct a Stone Soup activity)?

This assignment was due December 8, 2017 (the last day of classes). Students had to complete a class presentation based on the assignment completed the last 2 weeks of classes.

10. What percentage of the grade was allocated to the assignment?

The paper was worth 50%. A presentation on the paper was worth 15%.

11. Did you discuss in class the results of students' work? If so, what did you and the students learn from this discussion? Was this a good use of class time?

We unfortunately ran out of time for in-class discussion, but I did solicit online feedback, and students informally mentioned a number of other useful comments. In future, I would add extra time for class discussion.

12. What worked well with the assignment or activity?

I found that giving lots of notice, having an 'open door' policy regarding questions or problems, having clear instructions, some in-class education on interviewing and ethics, and having a pre-assignment vetting process was all useful.

Here are a few quotes from the anonymous student feedback:

"I gained insight into the actual practice of law. After completing this assignment, I can see myself in the position of the legal counsel of my interviewee. I understand legal terms and process better (e.g. statement of claim, notice to settle), but also how frustrating the process can be for clients. I was really comfortable with the procedural aspect of the assignment. It felt like 'field research' (e.g. submit a proposal, ethics review, outline your research procedure, email appts, prepare an interview template, transcribe it etc...), but within a legal case."

"Having to ask the difficult questions was an emotional challenge. A lawyer must take care of themselves in the process and find techniques to detach one's self when necessary."

"I learned that interviewing someone requires a lot of prep work. One must be careful because most clients seek a lawyer when they are going through a difficult situation in their life, therefore, ethics must always be considered before and after the interview."

"The Stone Soup interview presentation and paper really allowed for a practical experience in the first few months of law school. This is something that outside of the PILS week is not afforded most students in their first year and offers a welcomed break from the theoretical endeavours. It gave students and myself the express opportunity

to put to action many of the skills that we honed and identified over the A2J semester and as such provided for a very p[practical experience.”

13. What would you do differently if you do it again?

I would be a bit more prescriptive about the types of people or problems they could choose. I would give more training on interviewing and both research and legal ethics.

Quote from a student (first time a student has EVER said this): “I almost wished the assignment could have been longer.”

Quote from a student: “Establishing meeting times was also a challenge but I found this easy to remedy by simply starting the assignment really early (third week).”

14. What would you advise other faculty considering using a Stone Soup assignment or activity?

This was a very rewarding experience for me and for most of my students. It was also very time consuming. Students had many questions each week during my office hours (which were out-the-door, down-the-hall busy), which is great from an engagement perspective. I should have allowed less leeway in the choice of interview subject. The students seemed to think ‘the more dramatic the better’ without understanding how vulnerable some people are. Overall, it worked extremely well and was a truly “deep” learning experience. I would suggest (if possible) dividing it up into smaller, graded chunks. Also, I didn’t expect that so many students would choose interview subjects who ultimately had to withdraw. Having a back up plan was important. If I was really creative and had a full year class (or upper year students) I would take this to the next level from a policy perspective. Almost all interview subjects recommended policy change that was very meaningful and could have been the subject of a separate paper.

15. What did students learn that they wouldn’t have learned without the Stone Soup assignment or activity?

The students learned quite a lot about interviewing subjects. They also learned about a wide variety of areas of law, and particularly how people experience law (which is often different from how it is written). They also learned about research ethics and lawyers’ ethics, as well as common methodological challenges in conducting qualitative research.

Quote from a student: “Yes I would most definitely recommend this exercise for future years as it adds a very essential element to the establishment of foundational competencies for future lawyers. Being able to identify and recognize social, systemic, financial, geographical, and a host of other issues from the beginning prepares

students for a future where there is a necessity to be fluent in these issues so as to traffic in them for the betterment of the client."

Quote from a student: "The experience left me more appreciative of A2J. Hearing real life A2J stories, then connecting them to A2J literature was insightful. The experience speaks to the need for dynamic, empathetic, and socially conscious lawyers."