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REVIEW ESSAY

Law & Society REVIEW

How to train a student

There are multiple ways that I can describe the impact of Laurie Edelman on my life. I think the first one, and the one that most of you are familiar with, would be intellectual. The second, her mentorship, was far less public. In both ways—as an advisor and as a mentor—Laurie was extraordinary.

I came to the Jurisprudence and Social Policy Program (JSP) at Berkeley Law with very little understanding of socio-legal studies, or academia as a profession. Having volunteered with refugees in the US and in countries still struggling from the ravages of conflict, I was simply dedicated to understanding how to help people rebuild their lives after war. I used to say I was a do-gooder wanting to learn how to do good better.

JSP seemed like the right fit for someone curious about the world, undisciplined academically, and hoping for a career that could be policy relevant. As an undergraduate majoring in peace and conflict studies at the University of California, Berkeley, I had been in a fellowship program with a graduate student from the JSP. That was my first exposure to this unique doctoral program.

I had never heard of Laurie Edelman until talking with my undergraduate thesis advisor, Professor Laura Nader, about JSP. She told me, "You'll work with Laurie Edelman." It was a curious decision on my behalf. I was interested in international justice, a subject far afield from Laurie's research. I could only reason that Dr. Nader respected Laurie's scholarship and knew that she would challenge me. Still, at graduate recruitment day, several JSP professors looked askance when I described my intellectual interests. One suggested, with a combination of care and dismissiveness, that I would likely work for an NGO. Another asked if I knew Laura Nader, and that I should see if she could continue to mentor me.

I did not know what I was supposed to do in graduate school, but I hoped that I would find out sooner rather than later.

AN ADVISOR

Laurie was on leave my first year at the JSP, so I floated around without an advisor. I recall different scenes from that first year, such as when a prominent political science professor interrupted my presentation for our cohort's introductory seminar. I did a handstand and waited for him to stop talking so I could continue. I do not think he noticed.

That second year, when Laurie returned, I finally began to comprehend this professional training. I remember Laurie telling me that people would not care if I had practical work experience if I wanted to be a professor. I was extremely confused. Most importantly, I remember her comment in an early seminar that I needed to think about the contribution to the literature. I wondered if I would ever care about the literature.

Even though I was not sure why I was in graduate school or if I wanted to become a professor, Laurie seemed to have made that decision on my behalf. I do not fully understand why she decided that I was going to be her student and that she would commit to training me. Perhaps she liked how hard I worked, how I showed up to seminars and always had a question, or maybe it was because of how I came right back to my little attic desk every day, even with the more modern law school building next door. The JSP program is located in a beautiful and very old building in a corner of campus,

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high up on the hill. I felt right at home preparing tea in its kitchen, reading in its small library, and walking up its rickety floors.

Despite my best efforts to remain independent to the point of my own professional detriment, Laurie figured out how to train me. In addition to helping me understand what it means to contribute to the literature, something I now value and understand, it was Laurie who made sense of my many ideas. My research interests were focused on the people and the organizations promoting judicial accountability and truth-seeking interventions in response to mass violence, referred to at the time as the normative theory of transitional justice.

With Laurie's guidance, I changed my interests from how to make these different judicial and quasi-judicial interventions better, to why they were being promoted in the first place. Laurie studied discrimination in organizations. These two topics are on opposite ends of the socio-legal spectrum, but Laurie understood the concepts behind my interests. Because she did not fully understand my topic, Laurie could think about what I was telling her in a different way. She was the first person who said to me, "It sounds like you're studying a social movement."

No one had analyzed transitional justice as a social movement. Social scientists typically approach transitional justice from the perspective of international relations, which focuses less on the people and advocacy organizations that I was interested in. Others draw more directly on international law, with a clear normative focus on how to redress mass atrocities with judicial accountability. Social movements and organizations theories were precisely what I needed to make sense of the puzzle I decided to explore—specifically, the interactions between the transnational and domestic actors involved in promoting truth commissions, including their different political, social, and material incentives. Following her advice, and seeing its relevance, I read all that I could on social movement theory and organizations. I wrote a detailed literature review for her class, and used those theories to guide my prospectus, fieldwork, dissertation, and, eventually, my first book. I remember the gratitude I regularly felt doing fieldwork around the world when I had the concepts needed to make sense of the interview, observational, and documentary data I was collecting.

Although she did not work with the same kinds of qualitative data, Laurie understood empirical work in a broad sense, and she understood it well enough to train even a very undisciplined student such as myself. Through line editing my work (boy, did I need it), she taught me how to write a good research question, how to find literature that would help create a theoretical framework (for years I had no idea what that was), and how to align my question, framework, and methods. Over one very intense December, she single-handedly taught me how to write a National Science Foundation (NSF) research proposal. I would not have considered applying for an NSF if not for her, nor would I know how to write one of these specialized and demanding grants. Writing and reviewing for NSF is now an activity I thoroughly enjoy because of their intellectual rigor.

My work illustrates how Laurie's work on the legal environments of organizations extends far beyond the companies that she studied. I still use her work to make sense of social movement organizations, domestic courts, and other collectivities shaped by law. Laurie's remarkable work on the managerialization of law, legal endogeneity, and neoinstitutional theories shape my teaching, research, and general interpretation of the complex social and political phenomena I read about in the newspapers daily. In my newer work on domestic criminal legal innovations, specifically veterans' treatment courts, I see the important ways that symbolic structures manifest in individual courtrooms, and the value of examining courts with organizations theory in order to explain each court's unique goals and strategies in relation to their social, political, and legal contexts. Laurie's work on diversity rhetoric was prescient, central to making sense of current debates, and actual court cases, on affirmative action.

More generally, what inspires me the most about Laurie's work is how empirically grounded and conceptually sophisticated it is. She modeled the value of social science research, with strong theory, methods, and analysis that stays true to the underlying data. Beyond modeling this quality of research, she passed her skills on to others. Through her specific insights into my work and

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commitment to the value of a good research design, Laurie gave me a deep respect for social science methods. She pushed me to become a much deeper thinker and rigorous researcher, far more than a better "do-gooder."

In sum, Laurie was a tireless and generous advisor. She cared about understanding law through social science and prioritized passing her knowledge on to students. I can visualize her pride and surprise when watching one of her students ask a good question in a seminar, or thoroughly and accurately critique a piece of writing. I'll keep that image in my mind to help me smile as I think about this untimely loss.

A MENTOR

The second thing that I want to talk about is something that most people are less familiar with. I remember graduate students telling me they felt nervous going to Laurie for advice. She was tough on others and on me.

Yet, Laurie had an incredibly caring side to her. She could be empathetic and vulnerable in surprising ways. Like many others, my years of graduate school were the hardest of my life. I remember struggling to fund my ambitious project. After two grants were rejected, I came to Laurie unsure of whether I could do my fieldwork. I proposed a much less ambitious, and much less interesting, project. Laurie looked at me and told me that I appeared to be losing faith in myself, but she had complete faith in me. I remember leaving her office with an incredible weight lifted. Sure enough, I got that third grant, the National Science Foundation dissertation award.

I struggled even more to finish my dissertation. Several times during these latter years of graduate school, I was presented with a compelling job opportunity that would take me away from academia. One was going to take me to Africa to work on war crimes trials. Laurie sat me down and explained that she would meet with me every 2 weeks to keep me working on my dissertation, well aware I would likely stop writing. I assume she would have fulfilled this promise, but I made the correct decision to stay and finish.

Laurie saw me changing in my last year of graduate school, distracted from my research. I could tell she was worried yet unsure how to mentor me. The summer I was supposed to finish my dissertation, I simply could not. I was walking into the JSP building when another member of my committee casually said, "Where's your dissertation?" I burst into tears. Laurie whisked me into her office, where she comforted me in a way that still brings tears to my eyes. In that moment, she displayed a level of compassion I will always remember. By disclosing choices she made in pursuing her career, she helped me see myself in this profession.

Although I did eventually finish my dissertation, I was not one of the lucky ones to find the job I wanted immediately. Laurie had smartly convinced me to go to the American Bar Foundation in Chicago for a postdoc, an extremely fortunate opportunity. Still, in the years immediately after graduate school, I struggled deciding if I wanted to be an academic. I still was not sure how to get a job that I wanted. Though far away, Laurie helped me as best she could. Laurie told me to "give it five years" and not to worry if I did not land immediately. She was rightfully tough on me about the realities of the job market, even while helping me make connections to learn more about different opportunities. When I thought I had a job that was secure, she informed me that I likely did not. And, she was right. Fortunately, it only took 3 years to get the job that I had been eyeing since graduate school.

I doubt I would have ended up a professor—and a happy one at that—if I did not have someone who believed in me as Laurie did, someone who expressed concern when I was veering off course, someone who respected my independence, someone who pulled me back on track when I needed it.

This mentorship is not the norm in graduate school. We are part of her legacy, and I hope to pay forward her generosity and effort. It was a gift to have been her advisee.

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