Developing Environmental Law Education for a Post-Pandemic World

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Setting the Scene… *What* We Teach

- **Environmental law** – gradually moving from 'marginal' to 'mainstream' in the undergraduate curriculum
  - Increasing examples of the subject being taught as a part of the core law degree
  - Calls to 'embed sustainability' also increases the demand for environmental perspectives in law
    - Associating sustainability with legal imperatives
- But teaching environmental law poses **distinct challenges** for legal educators
  - Broad scope, difficult to delineate boundaries for teaching
  - Interdisciplinarity
  - Law changes rapidly
  - Tension between statute and 'soft law'

Setting the Scene… *What* We Teach

- **Online learning** is in the mainstream – but law has lagged other disciplines
  - Nonetheless, there is evidence of e-learning adoption and innovation in law

- **BUT -** COVID-19 forced an abrupt transition to e-learning
  - 'Emergency online pedagogy' and 'emergency remote teaching' resulted in mixed reviews from staff and students alike

Sydney University's sad admission as confronting picture emerges

An Australian university's sad admission and a confronting picture of a lecture hall has divided the internet, revealing campus life could be on the way out.

Tamaryn McGregor Follow

@TamMcGregor17 · 4 min read · August 31, 2022 - 6:22PM · news.com.au

An Australian university's sad admission alongside the emergence of a confronting picture on Monday, has not only divided the internet, but revealed face-to-face lectures and campus life could be on the way out.

A frustrated Professor Jan Slapeta from the University of Sydney took to Twitter on Monday to share a confronting 'post-Covid lockdown life' picture of what was scheduled to be an 'in-person' lecture he was facilitating.

The original post caused a stir among university stakeholders nation wide, after it was retweeted 275 times and received close to 2000 likes and 250 comments.

In a statement responding to the tweet, a Sydney University spokesperson made a sad admission, revealing student lecture attendance had "been declining for several years – even prior to the pandemic".

"We do still offer some larger lecture-style classes both online and on campus, but have been moving away from this format – where it's mainly a teacher talking – for some time," said the spokesperson.

Prof Jan Slapeta
@JanSlapeta · Follow

Should I be shocked again? 1pm lecture – no one! I lectured empty chairs. 10 min in a student that was early for 2pm lecture showed up (completely unrelated subject different degree). We had a great discussion and I had one keen student learning. Where from now? Help @Sydney_Uni
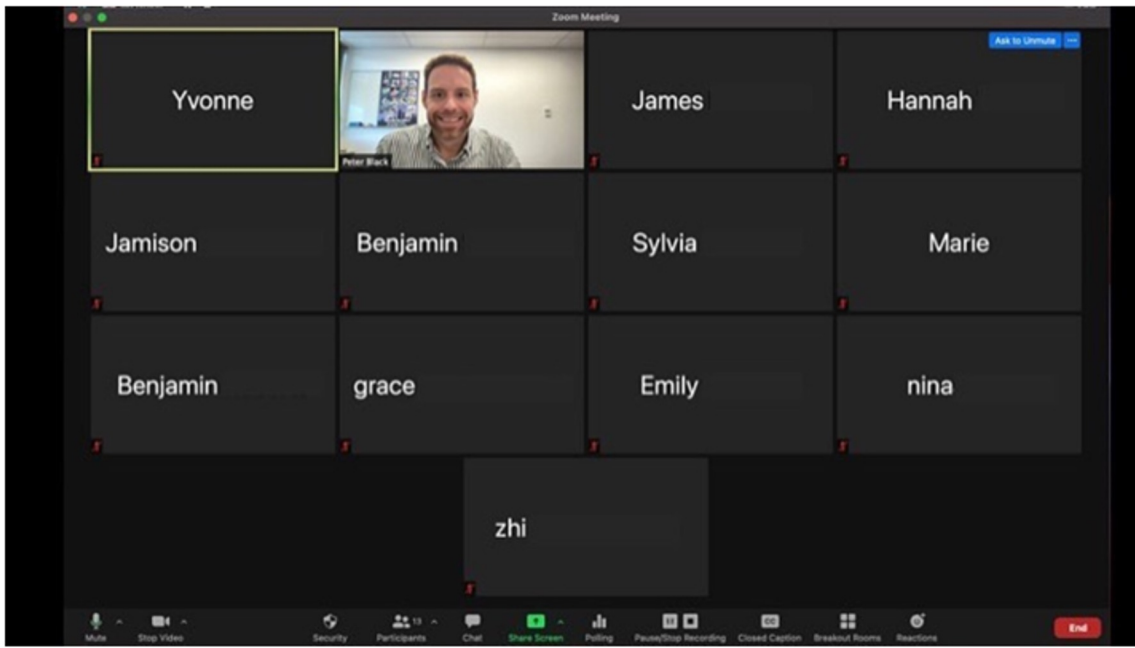
2:23 PM · Aug 29, 2022

❤ 2.3K · Reply · Share

Read 338 replies

Peter Black Queensland University of Technology Zoom lecture class. Picture: Twitter / @peterjblack

WAJ Wesbter lectures an empty room. Picture: Twitter @WAJ_Webster

Professor Gary Mortimer lectures an almost empty room at QUT. Picture: Twitter / @ProfRetail

10:00pm, Sep 4, 2022   Up

Talk to the chair: It's lonely being a university lecturer, post-pandemic

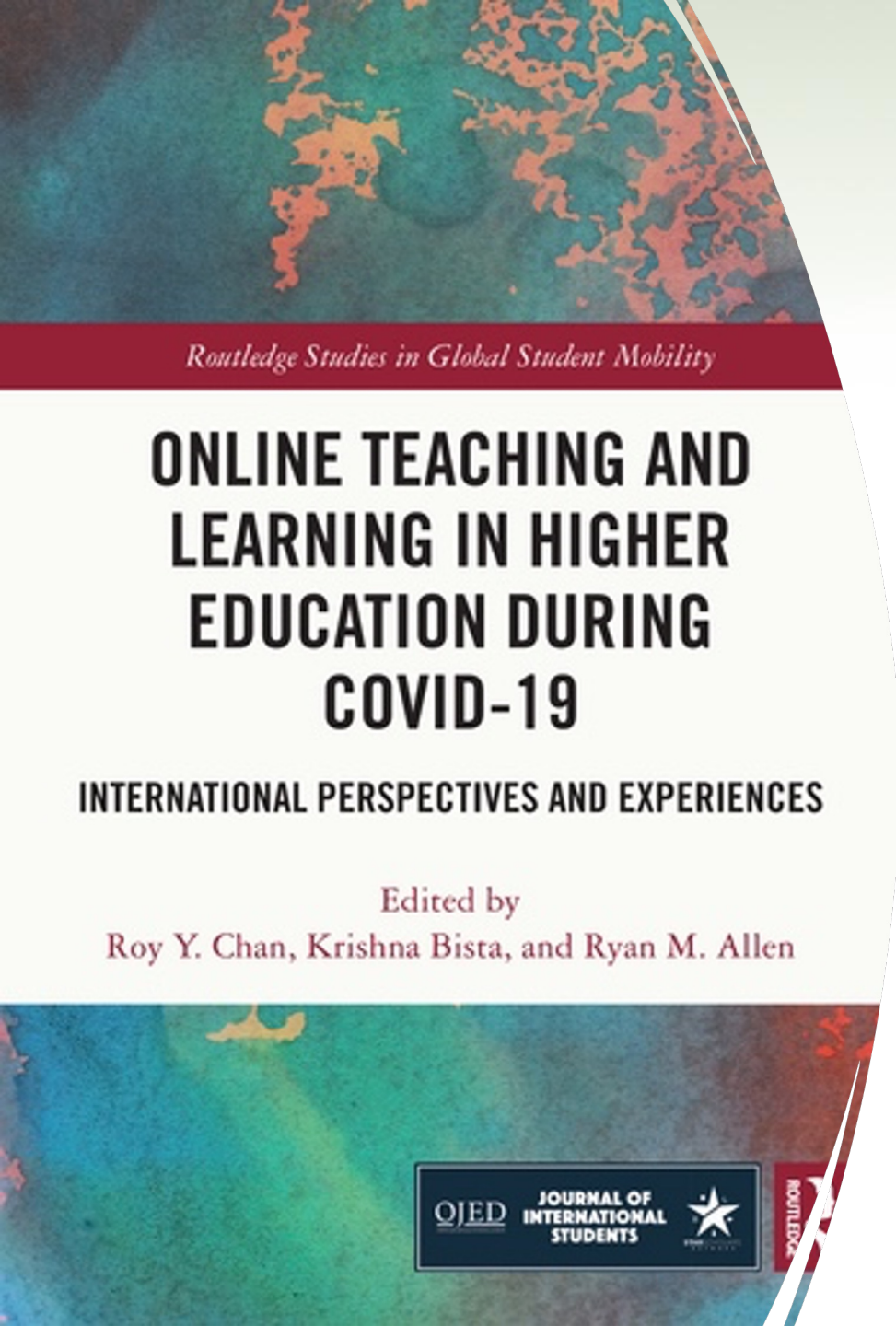## What is lost when academics teach to empty lecture halls?

Higher education needs to 'find the right balance' between online and in-person learning, says Sydney professor, after confronting empty lecture hall for the second time

September 21, 2022

"Higher education is confronting an existential crisis, and law schools are its poster child"

— Forbes, August 13, 2020

Why Online Teaching During the Pandemic was NOT (generally) well-received…

- The speed at which online instruction was activated can be considered 'emergency online pedagogy'
  - Students were online by force of circumstance, and the teaching was not designed for the medium
  - Many tried to replicate conventional classrooms (e.g. via Zoom), with little regard as to how to teach effectively online – synchronous participation fatigue
- It was implemented abruptly, involuntarily, and with variable access to appropriate technological infrastructure, staff training and support

See, e.g., recent book 'Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education during COVID-19: International Perspectives and Experiences', Edited By Roy Y. Chan, Krishna Bista and Ryan M. Allen

Electronic media is a 'vehicle' for delivering instruction, and is not responsible for influencing student learning outcomes 'any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition'

Clark, R. E. (1983). Reconsidering research on learning from media. *Review of Educational Research*, 53, 445–9, 445.
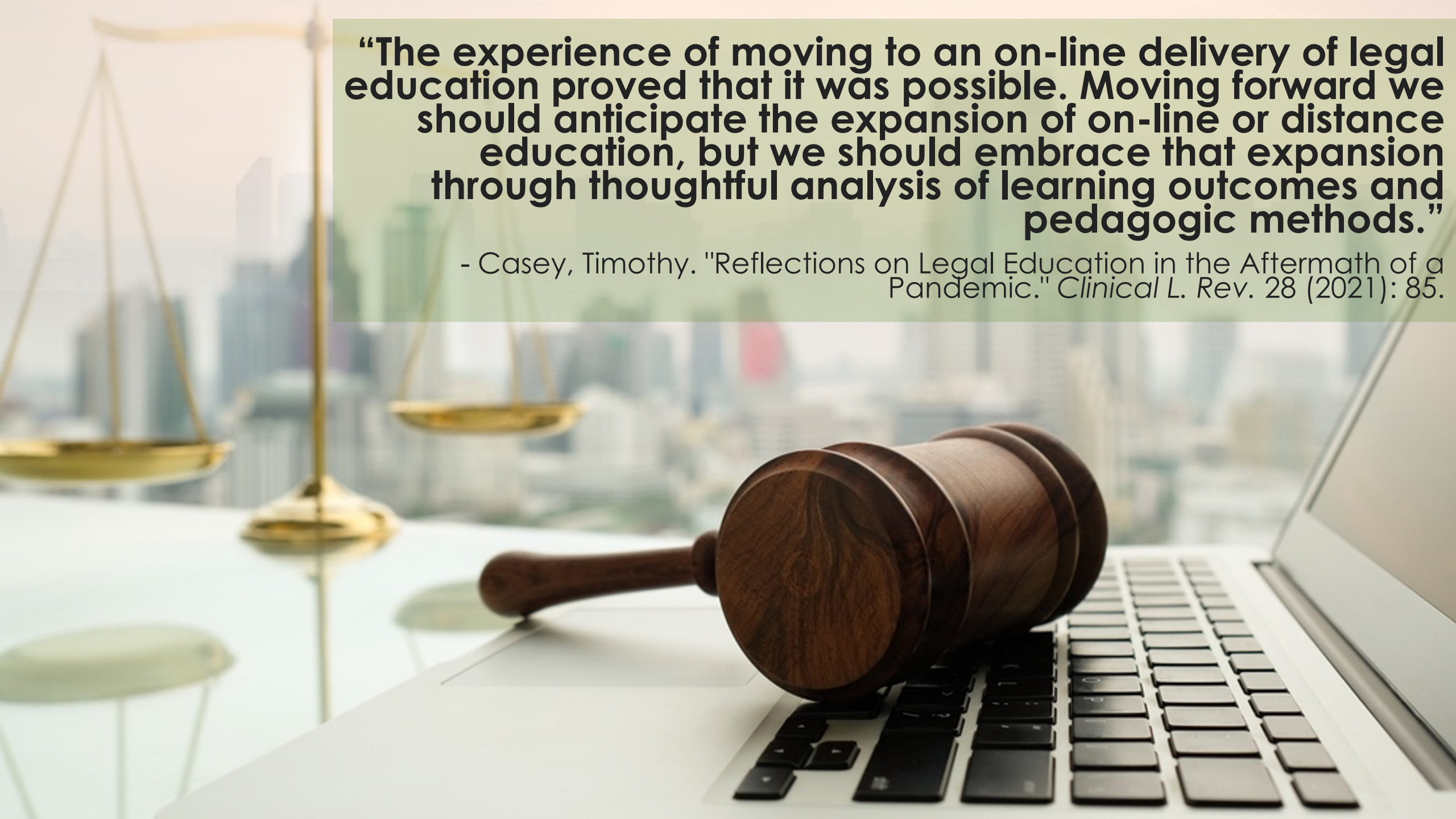
Five Pillars of Effective Online Pedagogy

- Incorporate active learning

- Building relationships and community

- Leverage learner agency

- Embrace mastery learning

- Personalise the learning process

(from Archambault, L., Leary, H., & Rice, K. (2022). Pillars of online pedagogy: A framework for teaching in online learning environments. *Educational Psychologist*, 57(3), 178-191)

"The experience of moving to an on-line delivery of legal education proved that it was possible. Moving forward we should anticipate the expansion of on-line or distance education, but we should embrace that expansion through thoughtful analysis of learning outcomes and pedagogic methods."

- Casey, Timothy. "Reflections on Legal Education in the Aftermath of a Pandemic." *Clinical L. Rev.* 28 (2021): 85.
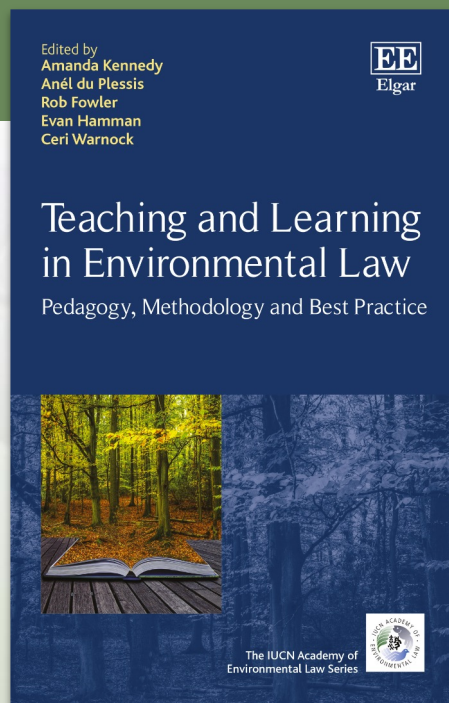
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*See Chapter 17: 'Never Mind the
Platform, Here's the Pedagogy:
E-learning in Environmental Law' by
Amanda Kennedy and Amy Cosby*

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