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## A student's teacher, responding to needs

BY JACK SILVERSTEIN  
Law Bulletin staff writer

When Loyola University Chicago School of Law professor Anita Weinberg received an award last year from the Family Defense Center, a group of her students were in the back of the room, crying.

"That says something," Rupa Ramadurai, a spring Loyola law graduate and former fellow at the school's Civitas ChildLaw Center, said, "when all of her students are sitting there crying because they are so proud of their professor."

Last month, Weinberg received another award: the Ignatius Loyola Award for Excellence in Teaching, an honor the school gives every two years.

"It's wonderful to be recognized by the university, especially because of the value they've placed on doing social justice work, which is really what this award is about," said Weinberg, director of the school's ChildLaw Policy Institute.

Weinberg's work at Loyola is the result of her dual academic background.

"I sort of wanted to be a combination of Jane Addams and Clarence Darrow," Weinberg said about the 20th century Chicago icons in social work and the law.

With those pursuits in mind, Weinberg received her master's in social work at Columbia University in 1977, followed by her J.D. at Loyola in 1986.

There was no child law program at the time — just a class on juvenile justice.

But when she returned to the school in 1998, the Civitas ChildLaw Center was five years old. The center represents children and families in any legal matter affecting children — such as abuse and neglect, adoption,

juvenile justice and child health-care issues.

The policy institute opened three years ago with Weinberg as director. It focuses on creating policy tied to legal matters affecting children and families.

"I think a key thing for the ChildLaw Center generally is to graduate lawyers who understand a broad array of issues impacting children and families and understand how to weigh the different issues out there," she said.

Weinberg achieves those teaching goals through three methods: Identify a student's needs, engage the student based on those needs and relay skills and information to that student.

### Identify a student's needs

Chlece N. Neal came to law school to provide a voice to those who "didn't feel like they had a voice of their own."

The only trouble was Neal rarely used hers.

"I was a quiet person," she said. "When I first started law school I didn't feel as confident as some of my classmates. So the fact that she paid attention to me was a surprise."

Neal said Weinberg's attention gave her license to open up and take chances. That's how she ended up working at the Leighton Criminal Court Building as an adult education instructor.

She doesn't think she could have done the job without Weinberg.

"I would have been afraid probably," she said. "Not of the students, but of doing something different. ... I think talking to Anita and being able to breathe and be myself has allowed me to try things that are definitely off the beaten path."

As for Weinberg's ability to put students at ease, Ramadurai added: "I feel like law school is



Anita Weinberg

generally an uncomfortable experience as a student. You're always on edge.

"But with her, I could be completely vulnerable. I felt very supported and loved by her in every conversation. She takes on a motherly figure, I think, with all her students."

### Engage students based on their needs

Weinberg's approach to student learning has benefits beyond the classroom. By teaching students on their own terms, she shows students how to engage with colleagues and clients on theirs.

"In the legal field, it's not one size fits all," said Ramadurai, now at Hodges, Loizzi, Eisenhammer, Rodick & Kohn LLP. "You have to know the partner you're working with ... and make yourself a malleable associate."

Ramadurai and fellow 2014 graduate Elizabeth Scannell — now working a temporary job processing Freedom of Information Act requests at the Cook County sheriff's office — learned from

Weinberg that colleagues and

clients appreciate a lawyer who is flexible.

"It's important to know your audience ... and she's just so good (at that)," Scannell said. "She's just constantly able to have a sense of where people are at and how they're feeling."

### Possess information and skills that the student wants

Teaching isn't just about knowing how to engage with students — it's about knowing what they need once you've got their attention.

For Scannell, that meant allowing students "to see things as not being so black and white." "It's hard for that not to sound cliché," Scannell said, "but it really is something that she taught me."

That lesson allowed Scannell to understand the importance of compromise in the law.

"Sometimes, even if you have to make small concessions, that's OK, because small victories can lead to large victories in the long term," she said.

Scannell, Ramadurai and Neal were all impressed not just by Weinberg's skills in the classroom but her achievements out of it, citing her work in matters involving juvenile expungement and lead poisoning.

"She was a social worker and an attorney," Neal said. "Exactly what I was hoping to be."

When Weinberg received her award, she quoted Alice Walker, author of "The Color Purple": "There's as much human compassion as there is human cruelty in the world. It is up to each one of us to do what we can to tip the balance in the right direction."

"I like feeling like I'm tipping that balance," Weinberg said. "And I like the idea that I'm helping students figure out how to tip that balance."