

# Legal Writing Institute Honors Cooley President Don LeDuc

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The Legal Writing Institute, a 1,300-member international organization dedicated to improving legal writing, presented its second Golden Pen Award to Don LeDuc, President and Dean of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

The institute honored President LeDuc for his longstanding support of law school legal writing programs and teachers. The institute presented the award in a ceremony at the 2002 annual meeting of the Association of American Law Schools, held in New Orleans.

More than 15 years ago, as Dean of Cooley, President LeDuc took a remarkable step in legal education: He put his legal writing teachers on the tenure track. He was the first law school dean to put writing teachers on tenure track and keep them there. And, over the years, he has publicly and repeatedly urged the American Bar Association to improve its standards for legal writing teachers.

In his acceptance remarks, LeDuc noted that the ABA standards for accrediting law schools require that they provide at least two rigorous writing experiences; in fact, the ABA standards make legal writing one of the few courses that law schools must teach. But according to LeDuc, “The ABA then endorses a scheme that relegates those who teach legal writing to the second- and third-string faculty.” The ABA standards do not require law schools to provide job security for legal writing teachers.

Only a handful of law schools in the United States place their legal writing teachers on tenure track. Most schools offer their teachers long- or short-term contracts only, and a number of these schools do not renew those contracts. Once the contract ends, the teachers must leave, thus guaranteeing that first-year law students will receive their legal writing instruction primarily from a corps of inexperienced teachers.

The constant turnover of a large percentage of legal writing teachers contributes to the recurring complaints of the public — and the legal profession itself — about the quality of legal writing.

According to President LeDuc, “If the legal education community wishes to respond to the criticisms of the bench

and bar and to prepare its graduates for practice, it should abandon its double standard toward legal writing and skills teachers and admit them to full partnership.”

He said that law schools must overcome the elitism that favors professors who teach doctrinal courses (like contracts or property law) over teachers who teach actual lawyering skills.

Likewise, schools must recognize that legal doctrine finds its application in legal writing. A guest speaker at the Golden Pen ceremony, federal judge Lynn N. Hughes of the Southern District of Texas, said that the usefulness of whatever students learn in doctrinal courses depends on legal writing, which “fuses culture and analysis in exposition.”

Thus, as Judge Hughes put it, “The work done in legal writing courses empowers the student to have a useful role in the economy, in our society, and in law.”

President LeDuc acted on that same view many years ago. In accepting the Golden Pen Award, he said that it “recognizes my support of what the Legal Writing Institute holds dear — the plain English movement, the campaign for better writing within the legal profession, and, especially, the effort to achieve equal status for legal writing professors within law schools.”

The Legal Writing Institute ([www.lwionline.org](http://www.lwionline.org)), a non-profit organization headquartered at Seattle University School of Law, is dedicated to improving legal writing and the teaching of legal writing. Through its various resources, it provides a forum for discussion and scholarship about legal writing, analysis, and research. The institute has more than 1,300 members worldwide, including members from every ABA-accredited law school in the United States, from college and university English departments, from independent research and consulting organizations, and from the practicing bar. Anyone interested in legal writing or the teaching of legal writing may join.

