



SUCCESS STORY

Moot Court Energizes Law Students

Collaboration proves to be the key to better legal education



Photo: ABA/CEELI

Serbian law students and legal professionals during a practicum session at Belgrade's Court of Justice.

A new practicum program is helping Serbian law students learn about their future profession. "You can't imagine how excited our students are after they come back from court. This program opens the doors of the practice of law for our students," said Lepa Karamarkovic, a law professor in Belgrade.

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Legal education in Serbia is heavily rooted in theory, and often the professors teaching at law schools have never practiced law themselves. Consequently, Serbian law students have little exposure to the legal profession's realities. Never seeing how the law is actually applied, students have difficulty transitioning from the classroom to the courtroom.

To address this, USAID, the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative, and the Young Lawyers of Serbia launched a two-week practicum for Serbian law students. Participants learned about the workings of a law court, including the roles of judges, advocates, prosecutors, and court administrators.

After an orientation session, practicum participants tour a courthouse and meet judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and court administrators. They visit courtrooms to observe how actual cases are litigated. Each day ends with a discussion in which judges, lawyers, and prosecutors involved in the cases discuss with the students what happened and why.

Participants are each assigned to a lawyer, who guides them and answers questions during the practicum. At the end of the two weeks, students participate in a moot court exercise. They choose to be judges, prosecutors, or lawyers. Using a hypothetical case, they plan their strategy and carry it out in moot court sessions where members of the Young Lawyers of Serbia play the parts of witnesses and victims. Real judges observe the process and then critique the students' performances.

The practicum has been well received by Serbian legal professionals, including law professors, who have participated. "You can't imagine how excited our students are after they come back from court," said Professor Lepa Karamarkovic of the Belgrade Business Law Faculty. "This program opens the doors of the practice of law for our students."

Based upon the success of the first practicum, all Serbian law schools are now participating. To date, 650 students have completed the practicum, and judges and lawyers from all over Serbia have assisted in the project.