

Eight years ago, Boston College published its “Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education,” a 10-page brochure that describes the process of being educated in the Jesuit tradition—of acquiring habits of attentiveness and intellectual reflection and positive action. A strong theme of the guide is education of “the whole person”: the idea that an individual can’t be viewed as whole if he or she lacks “an educated solidarity with other human beings, in their hopes and fears and especially in their needs.”

This sentiment is not typically associated with the pressure cooker known as law school. The stereotype of a law professor is the imperious Charles W. Kingsfield, the character played by John Houseman in the 1973 film *The Paper Chase*, which accurately portrayed a version of the Socratic method that blends instruction and intimidation.



*Repetti: Instead of a plague of lawyers on earth, benefits*

Teaching his Federal Income Tax of Individuals class at Boston College Law School on a Monday morning in March, James Repetti is, his dark blue suit notwithstanding, the anti-Kingsfield. A hard-nosed scholar to be sure, he has coauthored many volumes and articles with titles such as *Partnership Income Taxation* (2011), *Introduction to United States International Taxation* (2005), and “Textualism and Tax Shelters” (2004). But with his soothing voice and kindly deportment the holder of the William J. Kenealy, SJ, chair manages to exert a calm influence over a lecture room packed with five dozen second-year law students. “It’s about creating an environment where they’ll feel comfortable, empowered, self-confident,” Repetti, a 1980 Boston College Law graduate, said immediately after class in his office. “You’re teaching the whole person intellectually, but you’re also building character. I hope that by seeing me treat them respectfully they’ll go on to treat others the same way. So instead of a plague of lawyers on earth, we’ll have some positive benefits,” he said with a laugh, as though he were putting in a tall order.

At the same time, Repetti, who was a running back (for Harvard) in the early 1970s and is built like one, does not let up as he impels his students through the arcane ways and byways of tax-law analysis. To “keep things moving” in the hour-long sessions of Socratic give-and-take three days a week, he says, he appoints in advance what he likes to call “co-counsels” for each meeting, two or three students he will call upon frequently, especially when the answers are slow in coming from others. The co-counsels are expected to be ready.



*Tax I students (from left), third-year Charles Carrington, Marc Burton JD'11, and third-year Lauren Campbell*

Repetti's approach to what can be mind-numbingly detailed tax case studies often includes the spirited hypothetical. During a session early in the spring, the topic in his class was prizes and scholarships, and Repetti called up scenarios such as winning a football scholarship to Boston College, collecting the Nobel Peace Prize, and walking off *Wheel of Fortune* with an all-expenses-paid trip to New Jersey. Each example carried a different ramification for legal argument and at least one exception to the taxation rule.

At a few turns in the lecture, Repetti paused briefly to ask the students, "Is everyone comfortable with that?" He mostly stood at the podium but dipped several times to his left or right, leaning over as though looking for something in the rows. After class, he explained that he was maneuvering to make eye contact around the walls of open laptops on desks, searching for confused looks.

Repetti gives notice that his exams will include questions about made-up cases, which will demand a knowledge deeper than rote memorization of lecture notes and readings. He says that he aims for his courses to embody a teaching philosophy borrowed from the late Daniel Degnan, SJ, a law professor with whom he crossed paths at Boston College in the late 1980s. "Love your students to death, work your students to death," Degnan had advised the young law professor. In the Jesuit tradition of education, as the "Pocket Guide" notes, these commandments are mutually inclusive: Love, which must be entwined with communication, is epitomized in action.