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## Law school makes its case with TV shows

### Education, book forums touch on variety of topics



Massachusetts School of Law television hosts (from left): law professor Diane Sullivan; dean Lawrence Velvel; law professor Constance Rudnick; and Michael Coyne, associate dean. (Joanne Rathe/Globe Staff)

By [Gail Waterhouse](#)

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[http://www.boston.com/ae/tv/articles/2010/03/21/massachusetts\\_school\\_of\\_law\\_makes\\_its\\_case\\_with\\_educational\\_tv\\_programs/](http://www.boston.com/ae/tv/articles/2010/03/21/massachusetts_school_of_law_makes_its_case_with_educational_tv_programs/)

When Diane Sullivan's boss told her 15 years ago to start working on material for a television show, she didn't think he was serious. He was the dean of the Massachusetts School of Law, and she was a professor there. Neither of them knew anything about television production.

“I thought the idea would pass,” Sullivan said. “We started quite small; I contacted one of the local guys who did directing for Cablevision, and I interviewed him. Then the decision was made to [hire him] and give it a shot.”

Today, the law school’s television programming produces “Education Forum” and “Books of Our Time,” both hour-long shows that run alternately throughout the year on MyTV New England, and Sunday mornings at 11 on Comcast SportsNet.

Both shows have received numerous national and local awards.

The choice to create educational television programming is not one many law schools make, according to the school’s dean, Lawrence Velvel, who created the concept 15 years ago.

“Virtually every other law school in the country has a law review or a journal,” Velvel said. “We started something completely different.”

With annual tuition at \$14,490 and LSAT scores not a part of the admissions process, “different” might be a word to describe the Massachusetts School of Law in general.

“We are fundamentally a school that’s very practically oriented and tries to appeal to people who want to learn the skills and arts of practicing rather than what’s in case books,” Velvel said.

“This all arose under the desire to fill an intellectual niche that’s not being filled by any other [law school] in the country.”

The show Velvel hosts, “Books of Our Time,” has run more than 140 programs since March 2001. For each episode, Velvel chooses a book and invites the author to discuss the book with him on air.

Many episodes of “Books of Our Time” focus on different aspects of history, although sports and current events are also popular topics.

The program that Sullivan oversees and is often the host of, “Education Forum,” features the same hour-long conversation format.

Depending on the subject, she will invite one person or a panel of people — authors, activists, and field experts — to sit down and speak about the topic.

Sullivan said she likes having an hour to focus on one topic because she can have a thorough conversation with whomever she is speaking.

Dun Gifford, founder of Oldways, a nonprofit organization dedicated to healthy eating, was on an episode called “The New Pyramid,” dedicated to a food pyramid Oldways helped create as an alternative to the USDA food pyramid.

“I found it a very useful way of doing a show,” Gifford said. “The show was very well moderated. They were crisp and did their homework.”

Both shows take a lot of preparation. Velvel estimated he works 50 to 60 hours on each show, and Sullivan said she can’t put a show together “with under three weeks’ preparation.”

“People don’t understand that some of this stuff takes months to put together,” said Kathy Villare, director of video production for the school.

Despite the many hours that go into producing one show, Velvel said he is dedicated to continuing the production.

“Although it’s a tremendous amount of work for each show, we think it’s a lot of fun and a valuable thing to,” Velvel said.

And even with 15 years’ worth of programming, Velvel is optimistic about producing new content for future shows.

“It’s kind of like, there have been so many thousands of books written on Abraham Lincoln, and people say, ‘What’s left?’ ” he said. “You wouldn’t believe how much there is that we can still talk about.”

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