

## **Expanding participation through cold calling**

*Todd Rakoff strategically cold calls to encourage participation from less vocal students*

### **Featured faculty: Todd Rakoff**

Byrne Professor of Administrative Law, Harvard Law School

*Class:* Legislation and Regulation (Fall 2016), 80 graduate students

TODD RAKOFF, PROFESSOR: Over the course of a semester, everybody deserves to be called on. And one thing that you can do with cold calling is to bring into the conversation people who otherwise don't volunteer. I use the cold calling partly to expand the audience, the participation.

*[Classroom footage]*

BEN SPACAPAN, HLS STUDENT: The first couple of seconds after you get cold called, I feel like a deer in headlights. I think a lot of students do, but especially the second, third, fourth times you get cold called, that really wears off very quickly. My reaction to the cold call is very similar to the reaction when you're called upon in team athletics when you get the ball in your hands, or the baseball is being thrown at you to hit. There's that same, for me, burst of adrenaline. And it brings out a lot of that same, I would say, "team spirit" in not wanting to let the rest of the class down.

HANNAH KLAIN, HLS STUDENT: A lot of people talk about law school, the cold call, as being put on the spot. And you know you've got 79 of your classmates just staring at you. Your professor's just staring at you, everyone's just waiting for you to say something right, wrong, or whatever. And with Professor Rakoff it just doesn't feel that way at all.

*[Classroom footage]*

KATE FISCH, HLS STUDENT: I think it's a big logistical feat to facilitate a conversation among 80 people. And Professor Rakoff does a good job of calling on people who wouldn't speak up every day in class, and I think he makes sure that it's not the same five or six people giving their opinions for every conversation that we have.

RAKOFF: In a modern classroom, there's a very complicated sociology dash psychology of which groups are participating, which groups are not participating. It slices an incredible number of different ways. It slices politically between liberals and conservatives. It slices gender wise, it slices racially, it slices U.S. born versus foreign born. And there are lots of subtexts in the conversation of these 80 people. And so if there is a group that has been, not spoken much in the last couple of days, then I might well cold call on a member of that group, not to be a poster person for that group, but simply to draw in somebody, another voice. As a teacher you have to be both aware of those and not too aware of those differences. If I think participation is part of learning then I ought to do something about it.

BEN: Law school's a very competitive environment, but I would say that conversely the cold calling method in my own mind has brought me closer to the other students because we're all kind of in it together.