

UM Law professor examines the role of corporate lawyers in the court of public opinion

November 17 2009

In today's world, legal issues and controversies are not only tried in the court of law, but also in the "court" of public opinion. However, corporate lawyers tend to separate legal activities from public relations strategies. In addition, they have often viewed media issues as separate from those involved in providing legal advice.

Given today's savvy media culture, "no comment" is no longer a viable strategy. Nevertheless, there are small indications that some corporate lawyers are adapting to the new environment by helping their clients manage the public relations impact of their legal controversies. However, up to now there has been little systematic evidence gathered on this new trend and its implications.

University of Miami [Law](#) Professor Michele DeStefano Beardslee has used this platform to analyze the following in her new research; (1) how the court of [public opinion](#) affects legal controversies of large publicly traded corporations that have high demand for legal services; (2) how the intersection of public relations and law is managed by general counsels of these corporations, and (3) what ought to be lawyers' ethical obligations, if any, in this extra-judicial court.

Her paper titled, "Advocacy in the Court of Public Opinion Installment I: Broadening the Role of Corporate Attorneys" attempts to investigate these questions. Beardslee sent a questionnaire to all general counsels of

the S&P 500 (which elicited a 28% response rate) and conducted fifty-seven interviews with general counsels of S&P 500 corporations, law firm partners, and public relations consultants.

The research is being published by the *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* and is available now. The preliminary findings from this study will appear in two installments to be published in forthcoming issues of the *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics*. In the first installment, the researcher focuses on how public opinion can shape and affect legal controversies. It also discusses how corporate attorneys manage legal PR for their clients. In the second installment, Prof. Beardslee highlights some examples of wrongdoing by corporate attorneys. Due to the fact that professional guidelines put the spotlight on the wrong place and on the wrong subjects, they become irrelevant to corporate practice as it pertains to public relations.

Source: University of Miami ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: UM Law professor examines the role of corporate lawyers in the court of public opinion (2009, November 17) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-11-um-law-professor-role-corporate.html>

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