Our Next Strategic Plan

Nearly four years ago, the School of Law drafted its current Strategic Plan. In the five years preceding our 1999–2004 Strategic Plan, the School had made significant progress. A magnificent new facility had been funded and constructed; an impressive endowment was strengthened; a highly effective collaboration among the School of Law, the University’s Board of Trustees, the School’s National Council, and alumni demonstrated that we could achieve dramatic, timely, and focused results; and there was an imaginative restructuring of the library and computer support services into a new Information Resources Department.

The ambition to create a premier law school, however, was not fully achieved. As of July 1, 1999, there endured significant challenges:

• The School, as our 1998 ABA/AALS Joint Site Evaluation emphasized, had no first-year small-class experience other than participation in legal research and writing.
• The 17:1 student–faculty ratio was not fully competitive with leading law schools.
• The qualifications of our students were strong, but little changing. For many students, Washington University was not a first or leading choice.
• The School’s reputation overall had remained static.

The School of Law’s 1999–2004 Strategic Plan addressed three concerns simultaneously.

First, how do we attract more outstanding students?
Under the Plan:
• In the 2000–01 academic year, the School began a first-year small-section program.
• In the 2001–02 academic year, we initiated a “clinical guarantee,” under which each second- and third-year student was guaranteed a place in one of our seven legal clinics.
• In 2000–01, we started a three-year commitment in scholarship aid, rather than the earlier commitment conditional on class rank.
• In 2001–02, we expanded our Legal Research and Writing Program to six instructors (from four) to permit a reduction in student–faculty ratio and to improve the educational quality of the program.
• In 2002–03, we began a program to assist in repayment of loans, now named the Mel Brown Family Loan Repayment Assistance Program in honor of a naming gift.

Among results to date, we have seen applications increase from 2,430 in 2001 to 3,145 last year and concomitant improvements in student qualifications for a class size of about 220 students.

Second, how do we retain and recruit the most outstanding faculty? Since 1999–2000, we have hired 11 outstanding new faculty, reducing our student–faculty ratio to approximately 13.5:1.

Third, to attract outstanding students and to attract and retain outstanding faculty, the 1999–2004 Strategic Plan emphasized differentiating program areas:
• Interdisciplinary scholarship: In 2000–01, we launched our Center for Interdisciplinary Studies.
• International scholarship: In 2000–01, we launched what is now the Whitney R. Harris Institute for Global Legal Studies.
• Clinical studies: In 1999–2000 and 2000–01, we initiated the Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic and revived our U.S. Attorney’s Clinic.
• Public service: In 2000–01, we augmented our Public Interest Summer Stipend Program and hired our first public service coordinator. In 2002–03, we began the David M. Becker Public Service Fund to support the Public Interest Summer Stipend Program.

During the past four years, we have seen a rise in the academic reputation of the School (last year, 24th according to U.S. News & World Report), as well as recognition of our clinical (6th), trial practice (12th), and international law (20th) programs.

It is now time to begin work on a new Strategic Plan. The challenges in 2004–09 will be different. We will explore many questions:
• Are our student body and faculty the right size?
• Do we have the right balance among JD, LLM, and JSD students?
• Are we emphasizing the right differentiating areas?

Ultimately, there is one fundamental question in any strategic plan: What should be our priorities? On behalf of our faculty and National Council, I encourage all alumni to share their views with us. Just send your comments to my associate, Sharon Strathman, at strathms@wulaw.wustl.edu.

Dean’s Note: As this issue went to press, we learned of the death of the School’s great friend, William Van Cleve. We will memorialize him in our fall issue.