The Changing Law School

FOR MANY YEARS, the legal profession enjoyed some built-in protection from economic contraction. Clients needed lawyers as always, sometimes even more than in prosperous times. But the Great Recession that began in 2008 has diminished that historical advantage, as even major firms continue to retrench and job opportunities to shrink.

“As the profession changes, professional legal preparation must change. Nimble law schools innovate,” says Kent Syverud, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley Distinguished University Professor. “We are making concerted efforts to reduce costs and become more efficient, while strategically investing in career services and professional development opportunities. We are developing new technologies and dedicating resources to ensuring that our graduates find meaningful work in the law, turning their outstanding legal education into professional success.”

Indeed, the law school offers an array of initiatives designed to equip its graduates for today’s challenging environment. Some are new and represent a significant break with the past, such as the online LLM program for foreign attorneys (see below). Others build on the school’s proven strengths, such as expanded programs in New York, in Washington, D.C., and internationally. All are designed to ensure that recent law alumni can successfully hurdle the Great Recession’s obstacles, and that the school can navigate wisely and well in the new legal landscape.

This is coupled with faculty who are heading reform efforts through their leadership in national organizations and through their groundbreaking scholarship and research. In this vein, while long supporting conferences on cutting-edge topics, the law school will focus specifically on the future of legal education through a symposium this fall convening national thought-leaders. The symposium is part of a celebration honoring David M. Becker, associate dean for external relations and the Joseph H. Zumbalen Professor Emeritus of the Law of Property, for reaching the milestone of 50 years of teaching.

Partnering with Students

On the employment front, the law school has doubled down on placement initiatives, strengthening existing programs and adding new ones. The school’s collaborative model has ensured that job placement is a high priority for everyone at the school—students, faculty, and administrators.

“I’ve made placement my top priority, challenging the Career Services Office (CSO), our faculty, and our alumni to help us continually raise the bar,” Syverud says. “I meet with the CSO every week to track our progress. We take very seriously our efforts to place our students in meaningful careers, which is a core part of the school’s mission. It begins the day a student first enters our halls. We’re working at it literally every day.”

Specifically, the CSO has developed a team approach that culminates with matching each job-seeking recent graduate with a faculty member, a CSO advisor, and an alumnus to drive the

Law School Launches Innovative Online Program for Foreign Lawyers

@WASHULAW, THE ONLINE VERSION of the law school’s respected LLM in U.S. Law for foreign lawyers, is perhaps the ultimate example of harnessing innovation. While legal education in the future will certainly use technology in previously unimagined ways, the law school has demonstrated its ability to be forward-thinking with this new program. @WashULaw is currently accepting applications for classes that begin in January 2013, expecting to enroll 20 students in the first cohort.

The program is the only online LLM in U.S. Law offered by a top-tier law school. The venture was made possible through the school’s partnership with 2tor, a company that collaborates with leading universities to deliver rigorous, selective degree programs. At the graduate level, 2tor has online programs with Georgetown University in nursing, the University of North Carolina in business, and the University of Southern California in social work and education. Washington University is 2tor’s only law school partner, and 2tor will maintain an exclusive arrangement with the law school for delivery of the online LLM.

“@WashULaw allows us to use cutting-edge technology to train lawyers across the globe—without sacrificing quality or the personal connection of our residential LLM in U.S. Law program,” notes Tomea Mersmann, JD ’91, associate dean for strategic initiatives.
process forward. “We are working hard to place all of our students on a solid path for success,” says Katherine Scannell, assistant dean for career services. “Our detailed self-assessment process facilitates students and recent alumni in finding the right professional fit, based on their specific background, interests, strengths, and geographic preference.”

The individualized approach translates to CSO advisors meeting regularly with law students, as well as emailing opportunities to students whose interest and background line up with job openings. These openings are

(right, above) Career Services Office professionals frequently engage with students about career options through a full range of formal and informal presentations. (right, below) Networking opportunities with alumni and practitioners are a common component to most CSO programming.

The curriculum blends theory and a variety of lawyering skills courses, along with co-curricular activities. Currently Washington University’s only online initiative, @WashULaw can be completed in 12 months full time or in up to 24 months part time.

@WashULaw represents an unprecedented educational outreach to the growing number of foreign lawyers who seek to learn about U.S. law. “As globalization extends into the far corners of the world, lawyers are finding an understanding of American law ever more valuable,” says Melissa Waters, vice dean, professor of law, and @WashULaw co-director. “While the on-campus version of the LLM has been highly successful, online accessibility means that many more foreign-trained attorneys can earn this high-end advanced degree without the disruption and cost of leaving their professional and personal lives behind for a year.”

Daniel Keating, the Tyrrell Williams Professor of Law and the faculty liaison for @WashULaw, is excited about the program’s efforts to adapt the Socratic method to the new online platform, as well as future implications for the new technology. “As the law school embarks on this venture to create a high-value program, we will be able to assess other potential innovations in technology,” he says. “In this sense, the online LLM will serve as a pilot for the law school as we continue to explore opportunities in distance learning going forward.”

For more information, visit: onlinelaw.wustl.edu.

—By Betsy Rogers
gleaned from both expanded access to job postings and the legal project bank (see pages 6–7) and specific outreach done by CSO advisors on behalf of students.

Faculty, senior administrators, and alumni are also integral to reaching employers and other alumni who may have or be aware of potential job openings. In an expanded networking effort, fondly known as The Becker Project, the school developed a system for enhanced outreach to alumni to better engage them in the job prospect process. In all of these efforts, law school representatives—CSO advisors, administrators, alumni, and faculty—frequently target employers to introduce individual students and tout their specific strengths.

“Along with the CSO professionals, faculty members are excellent resources for information since many are distinguished practitioners and/or researchers in their respective fields,” notes Steve Chiang, JD ’11, now an associate at Oliff & Berridge PLC in Alexandria, Virginia. “They are genuinely interested in helping students and will refer them to colleagues, peers, and friends who may be able to provide further assistance. When working with the CSO and faculty for my own job search, I found it immediately evident that they truly focus on each and every student as an individual.”

Growing Network of Contacts

Although networking has always been an important tool in a job search, it has become paramount in the current market. The CSO has expanded networking opportunities, providing students with access to 3,000 professionals from across the country during the past academic year alone. Almost 300 attorneys visit campus each year, and students can meet and talk with them at events like Corporate Counsel Day, Small Firm Day, Pro Bono Day, Women’s Law Day, the Employer Showcase, and the Government and Public Interest Job Fair, as well as Skype-based informational sessions and career-focused iChats.

“The Career Services Office helped me network when I moved to a new and unfamiliar city,” notes Harry Dorcy, JD ’11, who clerked for the 18th Judicial District Court after law school. “They put me in contact with other Washington University alumni, and they helped me land a clerkship in my

Help Wanted!

Legal Project Bank Links

Students, Attorneys

TWO CONSTANTS of the legal profession are that law students could always use ways to gain real-world experience, and practicing attorneys could always use help managing their case loads. A few years ago, the Career Services Office (CSO) launched an innovative program to meet both needs—the Legal Project Bank.

“The Legal Project Bank helps attorneys get excellent legal assistance without committing to hiring a permanent intern or attorney before they are sure about their future needs,” says Katherine Scannell, assistant dean of career services. “At the same time, it helps students get hands-on experience using the skills they are learning in class.”

The process is simple. Attorneys who need help post to a confidential online job board describing their projects. Students then submit cover letters and résumés for consideration. Once selected, students can work remotely. The CSO will also help

CSO Services

Advice from the Pros/Small Group Discussions
Advising and Custom Job Search Strategies
The Becker Project
Brown Bag Discussions with Attorneys
City Connect Employer/Alumni Receptions
Database Search Engines
Free CLE Events

iChat and Instant Messaging
Job Postings
Legal Project Bank
Mock Interviews
Off-Campus Interviews
On-Campus Interviews
Peer Mentoring Lab
Virtual Networking