

## Program Review and Academic Program Assessment

### Law School Assessment Summary For the year ending in August, 2004

**1. National Accreditation Process:** The Law School is subject to a seven-year accreditation cycle by the American Bar Association. The next ABA visit to the Law School is scheduled for the spring of 2006. The Law School has already begun preparing for that visit. Part of that process consists of a self-study. The self-study, which will build on our recently-adopted Strategic Plan, will include reviews of our admissions process, our curriculum, and the extent to which our professional training program meets the needs of our students, and the profession. Faculty, staff, students, alumni, and members of the bar will all have the opportunity to play a role in this process. This accreditation cycle substantially shapes our program assessment efforts. It is important to realize that it is an ongoing project, rather than something which occurs only once in seven years. It generally involves 18 months or more of preparation, and then as much as a year of follow-up. In addition, the Law School is required, as an ABA accredited school, to prepare and submit an annual report, parts of which provide further opportunities for program reviews and assessments.

**2. Program Reviews:** In addition to the preparation for the accreditation process, the Law School has recently concluded a study of its Legal Research and Writing Program. This resulted in the hiring of a new Director, and the reconceptualization of the program. The program is now titled the Communication & Advocacy Program, and includes not only our first-year legal research and writing program, but also our advanced legal writing program, and our moot court and trial advocacy programs. We sought, and received, a grant from the Chancellor's office to analyze the outcomes of these changes. That assessment effort, which involves tracking changes in students capabilities as they progress through the program, is now underway.

The budget cuts of the last biennium also prompted an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of the components of our JD program. A more intensive review of the Legal Defense Program (LDP) grew out of that general program review. This review, conducted by the Law School's Academic Planning Council, included solicited input from graduates who had been involved in the program in the past, as well as interviews with judges and lawyers who had worked with participants of the program. The final results of that inquiry are currently being reviewed by the Academic Planning Council.

### **3. Has the School assessment plan been updated in the past year?**

No. The assessment plan has grown out of the Strategic Plan, and the accreditation process. Those structures guide the shorter-term efforts. In addition, the Law School engaged in an extensive survey of its alumni in 2000, and participated in the 2004 Law School Survey of Student Engagement. The Law School continues to reflect on the meaning of data gathered in those efforts as it evaluates adjustments in its student-directed programming.

#### **4. The Law School's Assessment Activities:**

The Law School has a standing faculty Curriculum Committee, which monitors the curriculum and its effectiveness. In addition, as part of the Strategic Plan the School created a "Re-imagining the Curriculum" Committee. That committee is comprised of students, faculty, and administrators, and is actively seeking to explore ways in which both short and long range changes can be made in the curriculum. A series of Friday afternoon workshops and discussion sections are planned for 2005 to provide a forum for broader involvement of the Law School community in this review process.

The Law School administers student evaluation forms in all of its classes, every semester. These forms are reviewed by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, with a view both to evaluating the effectiveness of individual teachers and courses, and to assess the extent to which the curriculum is keeping pace with changes arising within the profession, or from methodological shifts in legal education. The review of these evaluations often leads to one-on-one discussions with teachers with respect to all aspects of that teacher's instructional goals, and ways in which those goals can be more effectively achieved.

The student services administrators meet regularly with the leadership of the Student Bar Association both to accept input from student leaders on matters of concern to the student body, and to seek the assistance of the student leadership in keeping students informed about changes which may affect them. The Dean meets 10 times a year with students, invited at random to a series of luncheons, during which he engages with students about the ways in which they are pleased, or disappointed, with aspects of their training.

The school monitors the results of licensing examinations, and placement efforts. The Law School has an active alumni association, and a Board of Visitors. Both groups provide the Law School with feedback and observations about its program. Over the years the cumulative effect of these efforts has led to a substantial increase in the investment by the school in clinical programs, skills-training programs, and the transformation of co-curricular programs (like law review, and moot court) into important parts of the pre-graduation experiences of many students.

The extent to which students seek to participate in the increasing number of study-abroad programs has significantly increased in recent years. This has prompted the Law School to begin a review of the ways in which we can more systematically advise students concerning the educational advantages (and disadvantages) of such programs. In addition, the increasing numbers of students involved in these programs has challenged the administrative systems for dealing with them, and we are presently initiating a review of those systems. Because these programs increasingly play an important role in the curricula of the students who participate, this review effort should be seen as a curricular program review.

*Report submitted by John Kidwell, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs*