

# Program Review and Academic Program Assessment

Law School  
Program Review & Assessment Summary  
2006-07

## Program Review

The Law School's program review is carried out by the American Bar Association. The ABA (actually the "Council to their Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar") is the U.S. Department of Education's recognized national agency for the accreditation of U. S. law schools. To be accredited, a law school must adhere to the ABA's *Standards for Legal Education*. The standards and the process of accreditation are meant to ensure a level of national uniformity in legal education and practice. In most states, a law school graduate cannot take the bar exam, usually a requirement for the practice of law, without having attended an ABA-approved school.

Every seven years ABA-approved law schools must go through an extensive evaluation to be re-accredited. The UW Law School's re-accreditation occurred in March 2006. The evaluation process included a three-day site visit by a seven-member team selected by the ABA.

As previously noted in our 2005-06 Program Review and Academic Program Assessment, the site visit marked the end of a long process that began in 1999 when Dean Davis commissioned an assessment of the Law School's curriculum. *Assessment 2000* (<http://www.law.wisc.edu/alumni/aboutthelawschool.htm>) collected information from recent graduates and employers about the skills and areas of knowledge that graduates need in the early years of their legal careers and about how successful the UW Law School curriculum was in meeting those needs. The Law School surveyed 1,000 recent graduates (classes of 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999) and more than 200 employers nationwide. The Law School also focused on student satisfaction as part of the process of the self study. It was one of eleven law schools selected to pilot the Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE), a survey to evaluate a law school's environment and effectiveness. Another part of the process was the 2004 Strategic Plan (<http://www.law.wisc.edu/alumni/aboutthelawschool.htm>), which was designed to set a course for the growth and development of the Law School over five years. The strategic planning process involved many different groups and identified priorities and goals for the school.

Prior to the site visit, the Law School answered an extensive questionnaire about how it met the ABA's *Standards for Legal Education*; completed a detailed web-based statistical questionnaire similar to the annual one that every law school answers each fall; and completed a comprehensive self study that culminated in a detailed report addressing the current status of the Law School. The Law School also invited members of several of its constituent groups to the Law School to discuss the view of the school from the outside.

At the end of the visit, the ABA's site visit team reported its preliminary findings to the Chancellor. In March 2007, the Law School and the Chancellor received the Accreditation

Committee's Findings and Conclusions, covering all aspects of the school's operation, including faculty and administration, the academic program, the student body, student services, library and information resources, financial resources, physical facilities, and technological capacities.

The Committee noted the many strengths of the UW Law School and its long history of providing high quality legal education. The Committee's Findings of Fact indicated that the Law School met or exceeded all of the ABA Standards for Approval of Law Schools, but that the Committee did not have enough information to determine the Law School's compliance with Standard 302(a)(4) and Interpretation 302-3, regarding required instruction in professional skills. The Committee noted that the Law School provides ample opportunity for students to learn professional skills, but that the Committee was unable to make a determination as to the Law School's compliance with the provision that each student is *required* to receive "substantial instruction in other professional skills generally regarded as necessary for effective and responsible participation in the legal profession."

The Law School has been asked to provide information by November 15, 2007 regarding how it does, or will, comply with Standard 302(a)(4) and Interpretation 302-3.

### **Academic Program Assessment**

This year, the Law School began a review of the sequencing of its curriculum in order to develop several practice-area tracks. Tracks or concentrations are not entirely new to our curriculum, but the Law School's effort involves providing a more significant track program that will give students the ability to focus on gaining the breadth and depth needed to develop a defined level of competence. The tracks also will give students the opportunity to take advantage of employment opportunities that require more than one or two introductory level courses.

The tracks will provide a recognized sequence of courses in several legal practice areas. Each will provide students with an introductory level course, several secondary level courses that are more specialized, and, for some tracks, a third level of courses that may also involve externships or clinical experiences. Full-time faculty will lead curricular programming in each of these practice areas, and experienced attorneys from private practice, government, and nonprofit organizations will enrich the curricular offerings. Finally, developing a sequence of courses will provide a measure of accountability in the Law School's curriculum and enable instructors to rely on what the students have learned in other courses.

### **Assessment Plan**

The Law School's assessment plan will be revised once the ABA's Accreditation Report is completed and accepted.

### **On-going Assessment Activities**

The Law School has a standing faculty Curriculum Committee that monitors the curriculum and its effectiveness. In addition, as part of the Strategic Plan the Law School created a "Re-imagining the Curriculum" Committee. That committee is comprised of students, faculty, and

administrators, and continues to explore ways in which both short- and long-range changes can be made in the curriculum.

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 school monitors the results of licensing examinations and placement efforts. The Law School has an active Board of Visitors that provides 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.

*Report submitted by Carolyn Lazar Butler, Assistant Dean*