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25 Innovative Ideas

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25 INNOVATIVE ideas



Law schools are experimenting like never before. Here is an overview of the 25 most innovative ideas by 21 law schools that have been launched in the past year. **BY MICHELLE WEYENBERG**

“Said.” “Boring.” “Predictable.” For years, those words seemed to describe legal education. But not anymore.

Try “cool.” “Engaging.” “Innovative.” Law schools are shunning tradition and trying new programs, teaching methods and other efforts to help graduates jet to the top of their profession.

“American law schools are now recognizing the deficiencies of the old model of legal education that focuses on the

science and theory of law to the exclusion of the professional skills involved in serving society as lawyers,” said Gregory Munro, associate dean at the University of Montana School of Law.

This newfound innovation movement is not surprising, given the dramatic drop in applications. That was spurred in part by the high cost of tuition and in part by the realization that fewer big-firm jobs means graduates need to be better pre-

pared to practice law immediately after finishing law school.

Not surprisingly, most of the recent innovations are designed to bring practical training into the curriculum.

We invited every law school to share the new programs and initiatives they have introduced during the past year. We then narrowed down the list to the 25 most innovative initiatives. We list them here in no particular order:

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experiential opportunities and clinics

1. The University of Denver Sturm College of Law is taking the lead in experiential training.

In June, it launched its Experiential Advantage Curriculum, which allows students to spend the equivalent of a year in real or simulated practice settings. It combines live client clinics, externships and legal simulation courses. Among the externship options is the new Semester in Practice, which allows students to work full time with supervision and mentoring.

Students who opt into the program take 24 credit hours of experiential learning courses in their second and third years in addition to their six-credit first-year Lawyering Process course.

2. University of Denver, in partnership with the University of Colorado Law School, is also developing a legal residency program for graduates during the first year of practice. Modeled after a medical residency program, it will pair recent graduates with firms, in-house legal departments and other law offices. Although the program is in its early stages, one major Denver-based company has already employed a resident, and several other legal departments and firms have committed to do so.

3. Touro College - Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center is also taking experiential training to the next level. First-year law students are interacting with unrepresented litigants through a newly launched ProBono Uncontested Divorce Project. This project is a required part of the first-year curriculum and will help students meet New York state's new pro bono requirements.

"Our first-year students benefit from interacting with and providing assistance to real litigants in need of help," said Dean Patricia Salkin. "This is a truly innovative program that provides hands-on experience for first-year students and a service to community members in need."

The program is off to a great start. Students have worked with approximately 40 clients in the pilot year and plans are in place to continue the program for incoming students.

4. Villanova University School of Law is requiring all students to take business modules aimed at building basic business literacy. The school has also launched clinics to support its efforts.

It has a new interdisciplinary health law clinic that gives students the chance to work on a range of advocacy matters on behalf of people with mental and physical health issues. Last year it launched the Jeffrey S. Moorad Center for the Study of Sports Law, which offers students the opportunity to learn from and work alongside industry leaders.

"With these new experiential learning initiatives, students have a greater breadth of opportunities at their fingertips to prepare them for diverse careers in law firms, advocacy agencies, board rooms and beyond," said Dean John Gotanda.

Last January, the **5. University of Nebraska College of Law** opened its doors to the Entrepreneurship Clinic, serving entrepreneurs and small startup businesses. Eight students spent the spring semester advising and representing startup business clients in a variety of early-stage legal matters, including contract drafting, intellectual property protection, real estate, financing and other transactional matters.

Dean Susan Poser said two aspects of this clinic make it unique among entrepreneurship clinics: First, the clinic has established relationships with other units on campus in order to help students in other programs who are interested in starting a business. Second, third-year law students are not only advising clients who

come to the clinic, they are also going to other departments on campus to teach undergraduates about legal issues involved in starting up a business.

"By becoming teachers and mentors while still in law school, these students begin to develop important networking and client development skills," Poser said. "They learn to put together a presentation for an audience; and they learn the importance of the lawyer's role in educating the public about the law and helping build bridges between professions."

6. Fall 2012 marked the formal debut of four innovation law clinics at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. They are designed to give students direct transactional and intellectual property experience in a real-world context.

"Our students are working with very young, early-stage entrepreneurs," said Robin Feldman, professor and director of the Institute for Innovation Law. "Imagine grad students with a dream for a new computer or a new drug delivery system. They each believe they have the next greatest idea."

In the Medical-Legal Partnership for Seniors Clinic, UC - Hastings students develop key lawyering skills through representation of low-income elderly patients at a University of California, San Francisco medical clinic. Students assist clients in legal issues related to health, such as advance health care planning, estate planning and public benefits.



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classes

7. Whittier Law School has revamped more than half of its required courses so students can learn the legal concepts, after which they go through exercises that help them apply the concepts to concrete material. This curriculum supplements the practical training the law school offers in externships and four clinics.

8. Whittier also created the Lawyering Skills Institute which requires three years of course work. In the third year, the classroom is modeled after a legal office, in which the professor serves as the supervising attorney and the student acts as a new lawyer. In each class, students are challenged to tackle tasks with tight timelines new lawyers

face daily.

9. Loyola University New Orleans College of Law has adopted what it calls Practice Tracks, along with four core-skill classes to be required of all Loyola students. The courses require students to attend training sessions in Client Interviewing and Counseling; Negotiation; Cultural Competence and Interpersonal Skills and Law Office Management and Professionalism. The Practice Skills and core-skill classes will be implemented in fall 2014.

10. The University of Montana's first-year law firm program consists of first-year law students belonging to a pretend law firm consisting of six classmates and a junior partner teaching assistant. The firms are learning laboratories that meet weekly to practice professional skills.

Last year, faculty introduced the students in the firms to live client interviewing and problem solving under supervision of lawyer faculty, said Munro, the associate dean.

Faculty members have integrated professional skills, such as interviewing, counseling, negotiating, drafting, legal research and written and oral advocacy into the required core curriculum in the form of extensive simulated professional legal situations and required clinical education.

11. The University of Missouri — Kansas City School of Law offers the Entrepreneurship and New Venture



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A student explains her business plan to law professor Anthony Luppino - who teaches the ENVC course - during the Regnier Venture Creation Challenge.



Creation course. This is a unique interdisciplinary mix of classroom teaching and clinical and experiential learning. Teams typically have four members, usually including one law student, one or two MBA students and one or two engineering or other science students.

“Many graduates chose solo and small-firm practice, but current economic conditions are adding to the ranks of intentional entrepreneurs,” said Barbara Glesner Fines, associate dean for faculty.

To prepare students for practice in these settings, the law school implemented a Solo and Small Firm Institute. The program is supported by three major components, including the Solo and Small Firm Incubator, which provides graduates interested in opening their own law practice with necessary support for success. New lawyers remain in the incubator for 12 to 24 months, at which time they are ready to go out into practices on their own.

“We believe our components of integrated learning laboratories and master classes can be replicated by any school committed to student learning,” Glesner Fines said.

12. **Phoenix School of Law** is introducing a first-year curriculum this fall known as the FIRSTClass Program: Full Integration of Real-life Skills with Teaching. The FIRSTClass Program has three features. The first is integration, which consists of traditional first-year subjects combined with skills training. The second is practicum, a robust, expanded package of skills-based activities. Finally, students are immersed in life skills, which are academic legal skills that

are coordinated with instruction in modern financial literacy and practice management.

13. **Golden Gate University School of Law** offers a variety of first-year lawyering electives. These are small, seminar-style courses that focus on the practical aspects of specific areas of law.

The Summer Trial and Evidence Program, known as 1st STEP, is an innovative eight-week summer program for selected law students who recently completed their first year of law school. Students take integrated courses specifically designed to improve their litigation and advocacy skills. The courses include Evidence, Trial Advocacy and a litigation center course called Evidence in the Courtroom.

14. **Temple University - James E. Beasley School of Law** has introduced a course that gets first-year students out of the classroom and introduces them to workings of a business deal within weeks of the first day of law school. Another class

gets them on their feet litigating a mock case in which they question witnesses in a deposition and cross-examine them at trial.

15. Recognizing the importance of global law in today’s interconnected world, the University of Nebraska created a required course this past year for all first-year law students. It introduces them to the fundamentals of international law, comparative law and the conflict of laws. The course integrates theoretical and practical insights and includes various skills-based exercises.

The course, entitled International Perspectives in the U.S. Legal System: Practicing Law in a Global Legal Environment, was added to the curriculum because globalization means that most, if not all, lawyers will at some point have to address an issue involving international or foreign law, said Poser, dean of the school.

“Accordingly, it is particularly important that our students be familiar with the intersection of state and federal law with international and foreign law,” she said.

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orientation programs

16. **University of California at Los Angeles School of Law** launched an orientation program to assist students in making the transition to law school and to help them gain foundational skills before the first day of class. During the course of five days, students participate in lectures and practice synthesizing and analyzing cases. Each student is provided a copy of “Cracking the Case Method: Legal Analysis for Law School Success,” a new book by UCLA professors written to help foster legal analysis skills.

17. **Loyola Law School, Los Angeles** introduced an orientation program that gives first-year students a daylong primer on networking and maximizing workplace potential. During the program, first-years spend a day on campus prior to the start of the semester participating in networking workshops conducted by Loyola’s Office of Career Services and legal industry experts. Sessions include Mind the Gap: The Difference Between Successful Students and Successful Lawyers in Professionalism.

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off site campuses

18. Some law schools are finding they can offer students more opportunities when they set up shop in other locations.

The University of Idaho College of Law in Moscow, Idaho, has created a third-year program in Boise, Idaho. It has opened three clinics, secured numerous externship positions and better integrated a semester in practice program.

19 & 20. **Notre Dame Law School** and **University of Illinois College of Law** have each opened a program in Chicago.

Notre Dame offers a semester-long externship in the nation's second-largest legal market. The program has moved into newly renovated quarters in the Loop, with a new conference room and a 40-person classroom. A full-time Notre Dame professor teaches an externship seminar on-site, and adjunct professors offer on-site courses to Chicago-based students and, through videoconferencing, to South Bend-based students.

University of Illinois also offers third-year students the option of a semester-long program of Chicago-based courses taught by practitioners in fields such as international tax, international bank-



University of Idaho College of Law students on the steps of the Capitol, in Boise.

ruptcy and executive compensation. Illinois students now have the option of studying as first-year and second-year students in Champaign-Urbana and as third-year students in Chicago.

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initiatives

21. **Regent University School of Law's** Center for Ethical Formation and Legal Education Reform follows upon the Carnegie Foundation's report, which found most law schools fail to develop the ethical framework necessary to enable students to achieve the highest standards of competence and professionalism.

22. The University of Colorado created a position of Student Legal Writing Engagement Coordinator, which reflects Colorado Law's ongoing commitment to excellence in legal writing by ensuring that second- and third-year students have access to intensive one-on-one writing instruction that builds on their first-year legal writing courses.

23. In its ongoing efforts to promote transparency, University of Denver launched an interactive online tool, Denver Law Jobs: By the Numbers, which allows users to calculate J.D. employment rate in any way they choose.

They can calculate the employment rate using formulas that are commonly applied by organizations such as U.S. News & World Report, NALP, Law School Transparency, and The National Jurist. Alternatively, users can design their own employment formulas to focus on the employment outcomes that matter most to them. Denver Law Jobs also describes each of the preset formulas, their strengths, their limitations and the value judgments inherent to them. All of this is intended to educate prospective law students (and other interested observers) on different ways of thinking about postgraduate J.D. employment outcomes.

24. **Syracuse University College of Law** launched a website, Student Spotlights, to promote continuous communication among the student body and its leaders. The website is managed by the Office of Student Life and offers online access to the most frequently used and needed information about student groups. Whether a student is looking for ways to

contact the Office of Student Life; search for collaborative opportunities with other student entities; research common student organization policy/procedure handbooks; or check out upcoming fundraisers — all of that information is at their fingertips.

25. **Florida Coastal School of Law** announced a number of new programs this year, including the Assured Outcomes Partnership, which provides participating students up to \$12,000 if they are not successful in school or on the bar exam.



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