

## **“Rethinking Overseas Legal Experiences from the Top Down and Bottom Up”**

*With the current strains and pressures that law schools are facing today, the new reality is that beloved programs are being cut--from clinics to moot programs to overseas programs. What is the justification for keeping law school “study abroad” programs? If there are compelling reasons for international legal education, who needs to be convinced and what is the most effective way of doing that?*

Contributions from panellists:

### **Colleen Graffy, Pepperdine School of Law**

All of us who are engaged in overseas legal experiences for our law students have either had to deal with trying to build student numbers (“from the bottom up”) or to build support for the program(s) “from the top down.”

Pepperdine’s London Program (semester and summer) was started in 1981 and I became the director a few years later. Experience gleaned from over 25 years has taught me that overseas directors need to be actively engaged with what is happening on the main campus in order to ensure effective student recruitment and support for the program.

Creative, pro-active and consistent marketing is essential. Student to student and faculty to student endorsements of your program are the most effective. For that reason, it is good to have a faculty member identified as a home campus director even if a staff member is doing the day-to-day administration. Rotate that faculty director position. Ensure that all faculty have the opportunity to participate in your programs so that they can understand first-hand the value of the program and can communicate that to students. It is also important that all faculty have ownership in the program’s success and that it is not seen as an opportunity for only the lucky few.

Try to have a former participant from the program as a part-time student liaison officer. Their infectious enthusiasm for the program and first-hand knowledge is invaluable. Introduce your international programs to prospective students as they are applying to and visiting the campus so that it is “on their radar screen” before they have been admitted or have accepted. Our surveys have shown that the London Program has been a key selling point in selecting Pepperdine as their law school. Avoid “self-selection” sessions about your international programs once the term has started. Information about international opportunities should be presented to *all* 1L’s during 1L Orientation; many will have never thought about going overseas so would not voluntarily attend an information meeting about it. However, after seeing visuals and hearing about the program and how it could fit into their schedule and enhance their careers and lives, they have a more open mind. Staff are also a key part of the formula: Admissions, Finance, Student Accounts, and the Registrar’s Office are all essential components in ensuring support for your programs. The Career Development Office (CDO) in particular should be a key part of your strategy. CDO will often be an influential voice in encouraging or discouraging participation. Our surveys have shown that students who have had an international legal experience significantly outperformed their home campus colleagues in successful employment

after graduation. Polling data like this would be critically important in influencing how CDO advises your students. Alumni are invaluable sources of support as well as internships and employment opportunities.

In addition to faculty, staff, students and alumni, your program will need to ensure that it is supported from the top down. Faculty might be enthusiastic fans of international academic programs but without financial support your programs will cease to exist. Financial support, however, is intimately and ultimately tied to “political will.” Political will decides what is seen as a valuable “expense” or an expendable “deficit.” Key influencers in establishing that political will include the president, chief financial officer, provost and dean.

For this reason, it would be an important role of this organization to influence the key influencers in their view of overseas legal experiences. What data needs to be collected, analyzed and available before the case can be made? Is there a semantic hurdle to surmount in selling international legal education abroad? Should the phrase “study abroad” be banned for fear that it conjures up images of undergraduates getting drunk in pubs, and larking about on fun but frivolous travel adventures? If there are compelling reasons for international legal education at the graduate, professional level, who needs to be convinced and what is the most effective way of convincing them? Should it start with AALS leadership? ABA? Who would make the most effective case to the deans? To the faculty? Or are students the ones that need to be motivated as to the importance of an overseas legal education? What voices would be most impactful in endorsing international legal programs to our key influencers?

### **Amy Sugin, Cardozo Law**

As a professional in international legal education, I like to think that everyone can readily identify the lofty goals that an international experience can provide aspiring attorneys—to develop competent, creative problem-solvers who can see the world through the eyes of others. But I must also admit the pragmatic and utilitarian concerns which underscore the division of scarce resources and competing interests in the law school (or really any) environment. To properly run our programs, it is important not to be naïve about attending to each of these, and to be strategic about involving stakeholders in ways that speak best to them.

It is prudent to involve the full range of stakeholders, which include a wide variety of constituencies. Prospective students seek out international program offerings as they weigh their options, and participating in admitted student panels, workshops and other events is a way to spark interest even before matriculation. Current students are a main stakeholder, of course, and key to cultivating their interest is to develop programs which have appeal. This may include developing short-term offerings at quiet times; being strategic about partnerships with international colleagues; and offering programs which further alternative goals. For example, we at Cardozo offered an international pro-bono program this January in order to help students collect pro bono hours once New York State announced its pro bono requirement for admission.

Both our international and domestic alumni are also partners in promoting the international experience. Domestic alumni—especially those from earlier years who did not have any

international opportunities—are gratified to see the reach of their law school globally and the expansion of opportunities for those who have come after them. International alumni are fantastic resources for our international programs in making introductions, giving advice, offering opportunities to interested students and serving as ambassadors for our programs.

Alumni are powerful voices in the law school. And finally, faculty and administration are crucial stakeholders. Many have a natural inclination or interest in international programs and activities—and these “low-hanging fruit” should be cultivated, reminded of both the pragmatic and loftier ideals of international programs, and, wherever possible, included on an international program themselves.

### **Adam Dubin, Universidad Pontifica Comillas**

Adam Dubin spoke about the need for U.S. law schools to work with their foreign law school partners to design study abroad programs that are attractive to U.S. law students. U.S. law schools have significant leverage during the negotiation of study abroad agreements, and need to use this upper hand to push foreign law schools to provide incoming exchange students with diverse academic and professional experiences.

Single semester study abroad programs in which students merely go abroad for classes are a thing of the past. Students are seeking out study abroad opportunities which offer higher value than just class room learning. U.S. law schools need to push partner institutions to develop high quality programming in which, in addition to classes, exchange students are offered internships, clinical and networking opportunities, LL.M. degrees and other diverse professional and academic opportunities, so that students can return with identifiable hard and soft skills, and feel their time abroad was not time missed at their U.S. law school.