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Engaging Your Faculty

by Leah Terranova and Alison Lintal

Faculty are a resource that may sometimes be overlooked by law school career services professionals. Efforts to break down department silos and work collaboratively with faculty can yield even greater service and support for your students and alumni. A partnership between career services and faculty is valuable for many reasons:

- Students are often more receptive to advice from faculty. Utilizing your faculty connections can help you build trust and rapport with otherwise absentee or non-communicative students.
- Relationships with faculty can build confidence in students and alumni. Asking faculty advisors or the dean to maintain communication with recent graduates can be key to ensuring that a student has the confidence to follow through on an effective job search.
- Faculty members are familiar with students' work and are able to vouch for them to potential employers.
- Keeping your faculty advisors apprised of the employment status of recent graduates provides faculty with current information about the state of the legal market and allows them to contribute new ideas.

As is the case in working with students, working with faculty is about relationship building and establishing trust. It entails increasing the visibility of the career services office and its events. Invite faculty to attend your programming. Ask for their feedback on a topic area within their area of expertise. Use trusted faculty partners as a mouthpiece for important professional development programming and have them encourage students to attend.

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach because law school cultures differ, following are three suggested methods for engaging your faculty.

Adopt-a-Grad

One hands-on approach for engaging your faculty is what our CSO lovingly calls the “adopt-a-grad” program. After bar results have come out, we provide faculty with a list of recent graduates who are still seeking employment. To the extent possible, we also let faculty know whether or not those graduates have passed the bar. Faculty adopt three to five graduates with whom they feel they have a good rapport. To remove pressure, we set reasonable expectations and let faculty know that simply reaching out to a graduate to check in will be helpful. We even provide faculty with a sample email that includes words of encouragement and a reminder to the graduate to reach out to the CSO for assistance.

Faculty will often look to their personal contacts to make introductions for their “adopted” graduates, but even without that step, faculty outreach has proven enormously beneficial. For graduates who are still seeking employment, it is often a call from a professor just “checking in on them” that gives them the motivation they need to continue their job searches. Faculty outreach sends the message that we still care about the graduates after they've left the building, and it generates enormous goodwill for the law school. Finally, it keeps faculty informed about the state of the job market in a way that hits home. Faculty are often shocked to learn that their star pupils haven't landed jobs by graduation, and this can be the rude awakening they need to fully appreciate the job market.

Form a Judicial Clerkship Committee

Another way to engage faculty in a way that allows them to leverage their personal and professional experience to the direct benefit of students is to form a faculty and CSO judicial clerkship committee. The CSO selects faculty for this committee based on their judicial clerkship experience and the strength of their relationships and current involvement with the judiciary.

Faculty who have maintained excellent relationships with judges for whom they clerked or with whom they come into professional contact are able to keep lines of communication open, often allowing you to find out about opportunities before they become public. These faculty are also in the best position to advise students on how to go about identifying and securing clerkships. Additionally, they can play an active role in preparing students by conducting mock interviews and providing direct feedback.

Involve Adjunct Faculty and Clinical Professors

Unlike tenured or full-time faculty, adjunct faculty and clinical professors are an immediate link to the real world of legal practice. Many of them have significant experience and contacts and are subject matter experts in their field. Adjuncts and clinical professors can serve as mentors to students with a particular interest in their field or serve as a starting point for students to begin to conduct informational interviews. Additionally, they can also assist with providing mock interviews, especially if they are involved in the hiring committee at their firm.

Many law students consider their clinical experience to be one of the most formative experiences of their law school career. Through their work in the trenches, they often develop strong bonds with their clinical professors and support staff. Call on your clinical faculty to help you keep tabs on graduates who are not frequently checking in. Additionally, like adjunct faculty, clinical faculty are often the first to know when a position becomes available in their field and can keep students apprised of opportunities.

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