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Law Schools Think Globally

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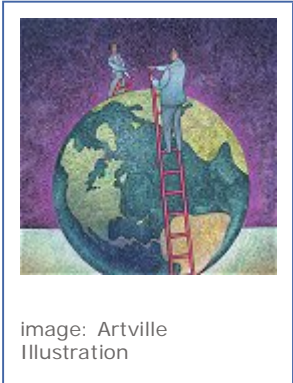


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Illustration

As U.S. law firms continue to open foreign offices and increasingly handle transnational cases, law schools are making international law a priority.

Law schools across the country are adding new courses, overseas study and double-degree programs, and hiring international legal scholars to update their curricula and make their students more attractive to recruiters at top firms.

"Your large law firms or the ones in major cities want people who have this transnational perspective," said Barry Carter, the director of international and transnational programs at Georgetown University Law Center. "That's where

the future is."

"A lot of people in the past practiced law and their only concern was maybe which U.S. states they were dealing with," he added. "But now, so many legal issues anywhere in this country are going to involve issues including foreign law."

Nearly all law schools now offer at least one overseas study or "study abroad" opportunity, and some schools are requiring some measure of international law experience from their students.

RECRUITERS PAYING ATTENTION

Recruiters have taken notice of schools' efforts. They are seeing an increasing number of résumés hit their desks with international credentials. Many recruiters say that experience overseas, coupled with fluency in another language, is sure to catch their eye.

"As our firm expands internationally, our need for lawyers, including new associates, with backgrounds and experience in international law increases," said Lydia Kelley, the co-chairwoman of McDermott, Will & Emery's recruiting committee and a partner in the firm's tax department in Chicago. "Our clients are everywhere, so any exposure is great."

"The résumés that we see have either a focus on an international study of law, or students have spent time at an affiliated institution abroad," she continued.

George Krouse, senior administrative partner at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett in New York and a member of the firm's executive committee, echoed that sentiment. "No question that the people we're seeing compared to five or 10 years ago are more internationally oriented, more likely to have academic experiences abroad, more interested in firms with international aspects to their practice," he said.

Firms are looking for international training mainly in corporate law, especially international arbitration, mergers and acquisitions, and intellectual property, though any international legal training is invaluable, recruiters say.

In an effort to introduce students to international law, Georgetown added a new program this year, Week One, where all law students take part in a weeklong seminar before the second semester of their first year. In this program, students are confronted with a conflict that involves a transnational legal issue and are asked to come up with a solution, often involving figuring out the proper jurisdiction for resolution.

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"[The first year] is a great educational year, but it's all domestic law," Carter said. "Some students might take an elective for international law, but we realized that in this critical first year of learning, that's not an accurate way to introduce students to what law has become."

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Similarly, the University of Michigan Law School now requires students to study transnational law in order to graduate.

Georgetown has featured international law classes and overseas study programs for several years, but is currently making a push to make international law a focus. "In the last year and a half, we've done a major study trying to think through transnational legal programs," Carter said. Georgetown is focusing on adding study abroad programs with major law schools abroad, including a year-long program in Paris.

"We're doing more to integrate the summer programs, we're envisioning [students] getting immersed in foreign cultures ... being exposed to international law and essentially getting the sense of this global society," Carter said.

PART OF THE CURRICULUM

For some time, Columbia Law School has had one of the pre-eminent international programs, so the school hasn't been focusing on expansion like others.

"We were already doing that, so I don't know if the recent trend is affecting Columbia," said Amanda Maurer, the senior director of international programs at the law school. "But we are looking to do more joint research programs [with overseas law schools]."

Maurer said that many schools are following suit, though. "I was at the Association of American Law Schools' annual meeting in D.C. in January, and one of the major topics was incorporating international legal studies into the curriculum," she said. "That is what schools are starting to do. It's becoming part of the American law school curriculum. We're bringing international law home, [it's] not just study abroad."

At least one law school is looking to Columbia's model for guidance.

The University of Southern California Law School began incorporating international law into its curriculum five years ago, and is making it a priority for the future.

"We modeled our program on Columbia and spent a lot of time talking to them about their program," said Deborah Call, the associate dean of graduate and International programs at USC Law School. "They really stand out as a leader in [international legal education]."

"Firms that have international practices find this to be compelling, and it speaks to the students' interests," she continued. "It just makes sense."

Call said that many students have expressed interest to take part in a dual-degree program with the London School of Economics, to be launched in the fall. Students would spend their third and final year studying in London, which means sacrificing activities such as moot court and law review.

Recruiters may be paying more attention to international experience, though.

"As we increasingly do work out of European or Asian offices, people with interest in those areas are of particular interest to us," Krouse said.

At McDermott, international law experience is equally useful, and helps an associate candidate to stand out from the pack. "Most of our client projects, from high-profile cases to estate planning, they all have some international component," Kelley said. "We need lawyers with those types of backgrounds."

Maurer suggested that the future of international law education in the United States could be double-degree programs, where students spend several years studying in the United States and abroad and graduate with law degrees in both countries. Columbia is the first law school to offer a double-degree program, she said. The current program is offered with a university in Paris.