

## **Plan 2008 Executive Summary Findings and Recommendations**

This report is the culmination of a two-year strategic planning process which began in Fall 2006. A Working Group comprised of members of our faculty, students, alumni, and staff and assisted by Blaqwell, Inc., a prominent legal consulting firm, developed this plan, with input from other faculty, students, administrators, alumni, and leaders in the legal profession. This is the most comprehensive, systematic, and market-informed study of its kind in legal education to date.

Our last comprehensive strategic planning effort was completed in 1998. The initiatives resulting from that Plan, *Building the Great Law School for the Changing World*, effectively moved the Law School forward by improving student and faculty quality and introducing programmatic innovations.

Plan 2008, *Building Great Leaders for the Changing World* refreshes portions of our 1998 Strategic Plan and fine-tunes our response to many of these continuing challenges for legal education. Unlike the prior endeavor, which looked at the Law School as a whole, this effort was narrower - focusing on our graduates. We have sought to further our understanding of the types of careers that our graduates are likely to pursue, the competencies they need to be successful in those careers, and how we can best ensure that they have those abilities.

### **Overarching Goal**

- ***Identify and implement foundational competencies needed for career success of our graduates***
- ***Differentiate and maximize the abilities of our graduates***

### **Research Process**

Assisted by Blaqwell, Inc., we gathered data through the following sources:

- ***Conducted 17 focus groups with nearly 200 participants consisting of:***
  - 39 law firm managing partners in New York; Washington, DC; Chicago; Los Angeles; and London
  - 10 government and nonprofit general counsel and leaders in Washington, DC
  - 9 corporate general counsel in Chicago
  - 59 alumni and law board members
  - 41 faculty members
  - 30 current students

- ***Analyzed industry data, trends, and US and UK law firm associate and partner development frameworks supplied by Blaqwell, Inc.***
- ***Engaged Prometheus Research, Inc. of New Haven, Connecticut to conduct primary research:***
  - Longitudinal and career path studies of Northwestern Law alumni classes of 1990, 1995, and 1998
  - A survey of approximately 100 legal employers to determine additional foundational abilities and providing a comparative peer assessment
- ***Reviewed hundreds of industry articles and reports, including:***
  - The National Association of Law Placement and the American Bar Foundations' *After the JD: First Results of a National Study of Legal Careers*
  - The Carnegie Foundation's *Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law*
  - The Harvard Berkman Center's *New Skills, New Learning: Legal Education and the Promise of Technology*
  - The American Association of Law Schools and the Carnegie Foundation's 2006 *Law School Survey of Student Engagement*

## **Findings and Recommendations Summary**

To succeed in a changing legal world, graduates must demonstrate strong intelligence and outstanding legal reasoning and analysis -- but that is not enough. Tomorrow's legal leaders must have additional abilities and skills that distinguish them from their peers. Northwestern Law will aim to ensure that all of our students are distinctively prepared to succeed by:

- ***Maintaining our strong foundation of legal education:*** We will maintain our tradition of exceptional legal education, with its emphasis on developing strong legal reasoning and analysis skills.
- ***Expanding our students' capabilities:*** We propose to make six additional foundational competencies a hallmark of the Northwestern Law education for all students:
  - ***Improved communication skills***
  - ***Teamwork***
  - ***Quantitative Abilities***
  - ***Strategic Understanding and Decision-making***
  - ***Project Management and Leadership***
  - ***Globalization Capabilities***
- ***Innovating with a new Accelerated JD Program:*** Beginning in the summer of 2009, we will introduce the first "Accelerated JD" program at a top law school. This program will enable a group of talented students with at least two years of work experience to complete their full JDs in twenty-four months in a more focused, structured program.

- ***Providing enhanced learning opportunities and improved pedagogy:*** We will aim to improve student learning by: providing an opportunity for a semester long intensive third year experience; providing increased feedback; improving course selection and progression guidance; and better integrating concrete, practical applications into theoretical courses to give students a better sense of “the real world”.

Further detail about our findings and proposals in each of these areas follows.

## **Expanding Student Capabilities**

- ***Improved Communications Skills***

Findings: We found that law schools universally are seen as not doing enough to teach effective written and verbal communications skills.

Objectives: Northwestern Law will ensure that each of our graduates have:

- Strong basic writing ability (grammar, paragraph structure, clarity)
- Effective legal analysis skills, including written advocacy, and strong oral advocacy skills
- Contract and other drafting skills
- Effective business exposition skills (the ability to communicate (in both written and verbal forms) with non-lawyer clients in a business-appropriate manner)
  - These skills include mastering non-legal writing formats such as bullet points, one-pagers, and presentations, as well as oral presentations

Actions: Northwestern Law proposes to:

- Increase emphasis on basic writing abilities in our admissions process
- Test incoming writing skills and track progress to verify the acquisition of these skills
- Continue our commitment of significant resources to our writing program
- Expand the mandate of the writing program to include all the forms of communication discussed above
- Increase focus on writing and verbal throughout courses
- Provide extra support where necessary, including a short writing course and peer-to-peer tutoring

- ***Teamwork***

Findings: We found that teamwork is essential to success in any legal career, and lawyers must be able to work effectively on teams of lawyers, non-lawyers, or both.

Objectives: Northwestern Law aims to ensure that all of our graduates are effective team players and leaders.

Actions: Northwestern Law proposes to:

- Consider teamwork in admissions
- Emphasize teamwork more throughout our programs
  - Provide students with social science understanding on teamwork
  - Teach students tools for evaluating and learning from their teamwork experiences
  - Infuse cross-cultural teamwork experiences into courses
- Provide faculty with training, tools, and assistance to integrate teamwork more effectively into their courses

- ***Quantitative Abilities***

Findings: We found that quantitative skills are essential in any area of the profession, and that educational institutions are particularly capable of teaching such skills.

Objectives: Northwestern Law will aim to ensure that all graduates are able to:

- Understand accounting and basic finance principles
- Interpret financial statements
- Evaluate and apply statistical analyses

Actions: Northwestern Law proposes to introduce new curricular requirements to provide students with these skills (originally as part of accelerated JD program, with the goal of eventually incorporating them into the required curriculum for the 3 year JD program)

- ***Strategic Understanding and Decision-making***
- ***Project Management and Leadership***

Findings: The clients and employers of our graduates need lawyers who are:

- Able to make clear decisions, and to understand their own and their clients' objectives, strategies, and decision-making processes. This requires an understanding of the activities of their own and their clients' organizations.
- Effective project managers – able to take on projects, work with others, obtain resources, and complete the projects in a timely manner – especially in law firms. The ability to lead and manage grows in importance throughout a career.

Objectives: Northwestern Law aims to ensure that all of our graduates possess:

- Strategic business understanding related to their own and their potential clients' organizations

- Strong decision-making and risk-assessment abilities
- The ability to effectively manage complex projects

Actions: Northwestern Law proposes to:

- Consider project management experience in admissions
- Introduce two new curricular requirements to ensure that lawyers have such skills:
  - *Strategic Decision-making*, an existing course, introduces students to strategic management principles and uses cases that require students to develop and recommend strategies and decisions
  - *Dynamics of Legal Services Behavior* will introduce social science foundations of decision-making, teamwork and leadership, adapted specifically for lawyers

- ***Globalization Skills***

Findings: We found that an increasingly global legal profession requires that students have the ability to work with others from different parts of the world and who work in different legal systems and languages. Moreover, the increasing globalization of legal services does not usually involve US trained lawyers working full-time in another specific jurisdiction. Thus, successful lawyers need not be masters of specific languages or bodies of law. Instead, they must be able to work with and guide clients and their organizations across many cultures and jurisdictions.

Objectives: Northwestern Law will enhance the abilities of our students to:

- Operate cross-culturally
- Operate cross-jurisdictionally

Actions: Northwestern Law proposes enhancing these abilities through:

- Considering periods of non-US experience in admissions
- Offering more cross-cultural experiences, including more meaningful interactions with non-US students, non-US internships, and opportunities to work on meaningful projects abroad
- Offering cross-jurisdictional courses and comparative perspectives in basic courses
- Including a growing number of well-qualified non-US students in its student body

### **Innovating with an Accelerated JD**

Findings: We found that most former and current law students and faculty believe that the third year could be used more effectively, and many believe it could be eliminated. We also found

that most employers would be willing to hire Accelerated JD students for their summer programs and to work with the school to address any logistical issues the program may initially pose for recruiting.

Actions: Northwestern Law will become the first top law school to offer talented students with at least two years of meaningful work experience the ability to complete their full JDs in twenty-four months through its new Accelerated JD program

- The Program will begin in May 2009
- The students will attend three semesters (summer, fall, spring), and then spend one summer working. They will complete two additional semesters (fall, spring), and then graduate.
- The Accelerated JD students will complete the same number of credit hours as the three year JD students. They will have a more closely prescribed program, including the new curricular requirements described above.
- Northwestern Law will work with employers to ensure that these motivated, experienced students are given appropriate summer employment opportunities.

### **Providing Enhanced Learning Opportunities and Improved Pedagogy**

Findings: We found that students learn in different ways, and that learning is generally enhanced by feedback and combining abstract theory with concrete applications. We also found that students could use the third year more effectively and make better course choices generally.

Actions: Northwestern Law proposes improving its students' learning by:

- Providing opportunities for semester-long experiential semesters in the third year (clinical placements; intensive academic semesters; externships with government, non-profits, or foreign law firms)
- Increasing interim feedback during courses
- Better integrating concrete, real world examples into abstract courses to assist in student learning and give increased exposure to the practice of law
- Advocating that students take recommended courses – both foundational and topic-specific (recommendations to be developed in conjunction with practitioners)
- Provide further guidance on course progression