

**SCHOOL OF LAW OUTCOME ASSESSMENT REPORT**  
**CASE FACULTY SENATE**  
(February 27, 2004)

**School Level Assessment**

- Every seven years, as part of the law school accreditation process, the School of Law conducts a comprehensive self-study.<sup>1</sup>
- Under the leadership of the Dean, the School of Law formalizes its strategic plan for the future.<sup>2</sup>
- Beginning in the summer of 2003, the School of Law undertook a formal study of its place in the US News Rankings, generated a report that assessed the school's position, and made numerous recommendations to the faculty, most of which were approved and are in the process of being implemented.<sup>3</sup>

**Programmatic Assessment**

- The School of Law recently implemented a new, three-year, integrated skills training program, *CaseArc*, and because of the experimental nature of the program, its collaborative teaching model, and the expansion of skill sets deemed critical to the contemporary professional (from writing to oral processes, from litigation to transactional skills, business planning, and focused problem solving), we have implemented several new assessment tools, including periodic surveys of students and informal, small group meetings with the Associate Dean.
- Each year, the directors of our Centers of Excellence (Law-Medicine; International; Law, Technology and the Arts; Business Regulation; and the Clinic) submit reports to the Dean, assessing both accomplishments and issues to be addressed. Some, but not all, of the Centers also utilize their advisory boards for providing assessment and input. For example, the Clinic's advisory board meetings led directly to the formation of a skills task force that designed the *CaseArc* program.

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<sup>1</sup> Available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> Available upon request.

<sup>3</sup> Available upon request.

- From time to time, the faculty reviews special programs to ensure that they are satisfying their own mission and that of the School more generally. Last year, for example, the faculty reviewed the Tax masters program and decided to terminate it. This coming year, the faculty will review our LL.M. masters program for foreign lawyers in U.S. and Global Legal Studies.

## **Individual Assessment Tools**

### *Faculty*

- Beyond the annual pre-tenure reviews and promotion processes, each faculty member provides an annual report of scholarship, teaching, and service activities, and a strategic plan for the next three years. These reports are disseminated to the entire faculty and reviewed (along with teaching evaluations) in private meetings with each faculty member, the Dean, and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.
- Students evaluate faculty performance in each course through written teaching evaluations. The quantitative scores are recorded and placed on the law school intranet, and the qualitative comments are put on reserve in the library. Student awards for excellence in teaching include the Teacher of the Year Award and the First Year Teacher of the Year award. The Alumni Association also gives a Distinguished Teacher Award each year.
- The Associate Dean reviews the teaching evaluations of all adjunct faculty.
- The Associate Dean recently held a workshop on professional development that generated both assessment and new proposals for changes in the faculty workshop series and assistance with publication placement.

## *Students*

- Traditionally, legal education utilizes summative assessments of students that focus on a final examination. The School of Law still relies heavily on these quantitative, comparative assessments, based on a mandatory grade curve that applies to classes larger than fifteen students. The School of Law, however, has started to depart from that model in several key respects. First, through the CaseArc program and our advanced writing seminars, faculty provide more formative and qualitative feedback. Second, a few large classes are moving to smaller graded assignments during the semester. Third, the emphasis on oral, social processes requires new assessment tools for the skills curriculum.
- Additional assessment tools at both the top and the bottom of class. Including but also well above probation levels, the Associate Dean for Students meets with students who have done poorly to identify their problems (social, emotional, or academic) and to provide access to services (counseling or academic support). A series of honors are given to students who do extremely well, including honors for highest grade in a class, Dean's Honor List on a semester basis, honors based on class rank and GPA given at graduation, as well as many honors for public service and service to the school and broader community.

### **Assessing and Improving Assessment<sup>4</sup>**

- The self-study has not been an effective assessment tool because it is motivated by an external accreditation process. This process has more instrumental, than intrinsic, value because faculties tend to see this as a pass-fail exam: that is, an obligation to fulfill rather than an opportunity for improving the school. Thus, self-study should be a continual process that is motivated by internal aims, and one that shows results in concrete ways (i.e., improvements based on candid assessments, generating solid proposals).
- In contrast, the rankings assessment was very successful, even though greater attention needs to be paid to the core mission of the school than to

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<sup>4</sup> The views expressed here reflect the opinions of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and may or may not be shared by the faculty more generally.

instrumental strategies to go up in the rankings. It created much greater awareness of how the rankings work (the methodology), and how the school is doing on each index. The report also made a series of creative and pragmatic recommendations, most of which were approved. Most importantly, the process engaged the faculty in a discussion of our core values (aside from, advanced by, or in tension with the rankings phenomenon), and that has motivated interest and commitment to innovations that are good for both rankings and our educational mission.

- The annual faculty assessments are useful for identifying specific needs and enabling faculty to meet their goals. As normative assessment tools, however, they are weaker because the faculty has not articulated a clear or strong set of standards for what we expect of ourselves in the post-tenure period (with particular attention to scholarship). Thus, the articulation of post-tenure expectations (as a parallel to pre-tenure standards) should be undertaken with a greater sense of ambition and accountability.
- The School's quantitative, summative assessments are very sound indicators of core analytical skills, and show a very high correlation with success on the bar. The School's experience with and sophistication in more formative, qualitative assessments of student performance are still limited and in need of increasing attention.
- The probation levels for students are too low and need to be raised in order to improve bar passage rates (now at 85%) and to provide the necessary remedial attention. Student honors and awards and their prompt and public dissemination need to be improved. The Associate Dean has begun a review of honors and started to develop a system for prompt publication.
- Teaching evaluations are currently inadequate, and need to be redesigned (format, medium, timing, distribution systems). The Curriculum Committee is currently undertaking a study of such changes.
- The School's code of academic rules and ethical standards (honor code) are being fully assessed, and will be revamped with particular attention on methods for their implementation and internalization by the law school community.

- Informal, small group feedback mechanisms (experimented with in the first year curriculum) need to be expanded to the upper classes. The Associate Dean is currently working with the Student Bar Association to develop a set of exit interviews for 3Ls, followed by debriefing sessions with 2Ls. This would allow the School to hold dedicated sessions of this kind with each class each year.

### **Readiness for NCA accreditation**

- The School of Law is fully prepared for NCA accreditation.

### **Challenges for Future Assessments**

- The largest challenge for the School of Law is to increase its sophistication about the range and utility of effective assessment tools. This is not part of our core competence in the way it is for the School of Management (and its organizational behavior department). Therefore, we would stand to gain from the assistance of others in the university who are more experienced with formative, qualitative, value-driven assessment methodologies. Secondly, in order to undertake more sophisticated assessments, faculty commitment and resources are necessary, and for that reason, they have to be directed first at high profile, high value programs, such as the *CaseArc* program.