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Dean Boyer Unveils New Curriculum Plan

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Special
Features

THE NEXT GENERATION

UB LAW
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*The Law School is
poised to make
significant changes
in its curriculum —
and your comments
are invited*

By Dean Barry B. Boyer

We stand at a pivotal moment in the history of our Law School. We are poised to move UB Law School dramatically ahead — to redefine ourself. We intend to seize this opportunity to rethink what kind of a law school we are and what kind of law school we want to become. A new curriculum plan is being designed. We perceive that as the first and most important element of a comprehensive reassessment, because it expresses the educational aims of our Law School and involves a major commitment of its resources.

Our faculty first started to think about curricular reorganization as a result of changes in the profession. Everyone knows the legal market is tough right now, and the difficulties that some of our graduates are confronting as they start to build their careers concern us greatly. Even those of you who have been practicing for several years are making more lateral moves than ever

before. The depressed job market is forcing us to think critically about how UB Law can keep its competitive edge.

We are convinced that we have to do more than just equip our students to think like lawyers. We must also equip them to work like lawyers. Above all, we must teach them how to make decisions like good, experienced lawyers.

For the past year and a half, our Planning Committee, chaired by former Dean Thomas Headrick, has been searching for innovative answers to these problems. We are now at the point where we are ready to begin discussing some general propositions for the curriculum with our colleagues in the profession.

Happily, we are building on a foundation of existing strengths and achievements: an excellent group of student-oriented faculty with cross-disciplinary backgrounds and interests; women faculty whose perspectives and interests give our program special dimensions; a creditable effort to have racial and ethnic diversity; a scholarly commitment

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Dean Barry B. Boyer

that has resulted in a large number of important writings; a clinic program that offers unique practice experiences for students; a sound trial practice program; the editorial responsibility for three major law/social science journals; the Baldy Center, which funds important research on significant legal and social issues; The Law Revision Commission for the State of New York, which is housed at UB Law

School; an active International Human Rights program; a promising U.S./Canada Legal Studies Program; a tal-

THE FIRST YEAR

* *The first year will not change radically.* Our traditional ABA core courses in Property, Contracts, Torts, Procedure, Criminal Law and Constitutional Law will stay. What will change in the first year are some of the elements that wrap around the core. These include:

* *An upgraded, small-group research and writing program will extend over two semesters.* We see a need to provide more time and opportunity for writing in the first year, not only to help develop that skill, but also to help people in the beginning stages of legal study

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ented group of Law Library faculty; a solid and supportive administrative staff; and a good public interest internship program and an excellent career development office. This list could go on.

That is where we have been. The following are some thoughts about where we are headed. Most importantly, we want feedback from you, our alumni, on what our 21st century curriculum might look like.

master the analytical methods that lawyers use.

* *Students will be given an opportunity to work with statutes and regulations.*

* *We will offer a new Perspectives course, to introduce more sophisticated problem solving that cuts across the boundaries of several legal areas.*

What do you think?

What do *you* think about these proposed changes? The administrators and faculty who are planning the curriculum for the next generation of UB Law students are seeking the broadest possible input. All alumni are encouraged to share their thoughts and help us design the best possible curriculum. Please send your comments and suggestions to:

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University at Buffalo School of Law
John Lord O'Brian Hall
Buffalo, N.Y. 14260

SECOND AND THIRD YEARS

The more dramatic changes will come in the upper divisions:

* *We will offer more concentrations and sequences.* We propose to offer concentrations ranging from 20 to 26 credit hours. These would include designated courses, a qualifying exam during the second year, and a third-year concentration colloquium in a seminar-type setting.

We have seen an explosion in the number of practice areas during the past 15 or 20 years, with many new areas coming into existence, such as environmental law and thrift supervision. We have increased the number of offerings in the curriculum, but most students receive only a series of introductory courses. Although that has advantages in that it provides students with a good overview of the legal landscape, it does not encourage them to move to a high level of proficiency, analysis and problem-solving.

Sequences and concentrations are one way to do that — to develop those transferable skills.

* *Eighty percent of our upper division courses will require an oral or written presentation.* This would carry through the first-year emphasis on writing and oral advocacy. There would be fewer blue books, and more practice-related skills exercises, simulations, or clinical settings.

* *A portfolio of written work will be required.* Students would complete a collection of professional-quality writing samples that embodies a range of professional skills. There would be checkpoints for each student to see how they are developing their portfolio and what skills that portfolio reflects.

This would create opportunities to include practitioners and adjunct faculty, and opportunities for faculty to mentor the students and talk about their career paths.

* *We will develop "research institutes".* We are also hoping to organize some of the research that's going on into "research institutes" that will provide students the opportunity to work in specific areas in depth to supplement their portfolios.

* *We will introduce directed individual study using faculty-prepared materials.* This proposal has two objectives: First, to allow students to obtain a basic overview of many areas of law. Second, to encourage students to develop the important skill of learning law in an unfamiliar area, as they may need to do in practice. We will accomplish this by creating one- or two-credit self-taught, but faculty-evaluated, exercises. We will also be experimenting with new educational technologies, such as computer-based hypertext systems.

We are obviously proposing many exciting and substantive changes. Making them a reality will be an enormous administrative and academic challenge, which brings us to a reality check: Can the 21st century curriculum outlined here be accomplished with our existing levels of resources?

The simple, painful truth is, "no." While we can start moving towards our goals, we can not possibly get all the way there without significantly increasing our financial base. For the moment, however, we will chart our course in the right direction and make every effort possible to obtain the resources that we so critically need to best serve our students and the profession. ■