Double Duty: Two New Interdisciplinary Programs Deepen the Scholastic Experience

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Double duty
Two new interdisciplinary programs deepen the scholastic experience

For students who want to combine their legal education with a specialized field outside of law, UB Law School has established two new interdisciplinary programs. Graduates of the collaborative programs will emerge from the University at Buffalo with both the traditional Juris Doctor degree and a master's degree in either library science or public health. Both programs offer a time advantage. Each can be completed in four years, rather than the five it would normally take to earn a J.D. and master's degree separately.

"What I hope this program will do is train people who are creative and innovative," says Dean James Milles. "It is an alternative way to get a legal education."

John Law School associate professor and director of the Charles B. Sears Law Library, directs the program in legal information management and analysis, in which students can obtain both a J.D. and an M.L.S. degree. He says the immediate goal of the program is to train students in academic law librarianship (as opposed to public-sector and law-firm law librarians, the other major segments of the field). Long term, he said, the program will train law students to manage amid the changing technology of the field - whatever law libraries will evolve into. Twenty years from now, it is not going to look anything like it is now.

"What I hope this program will do is train people who are creative and innovative," says Milles, who emphasizes that law librarianship is "not an alternative to a legal career - this is something that lawyers do." The field is changing rapidly, he says; as the traditional role of law librarians as intermediaries is evolving into relationships as partners and collaborators with information users.

Students in the program will gain expertise through internships in the UB Law Library. Milles says. He notes that it is a "buyer's market" for law librarians nationally - "there are more jobs than candidates right now." But both J.D. and M.L.S. degrees are commonly required for entry into academic law libraries, and having both degrees is essential for those looking to advance in the profession.

Only a handful of other universities nationwide offer similar programs, Milles says, and of those, several are joint programs shared by two universities. UB Law's program is run in conjunction with the UB Department of Library and Information Studies, in the School of Informatics, chaired by Professor Judith Robinson. The program normally begins with a year of information studies work, followed by three years of law school with an emphasis on such areas as copyright, intellectual property and technology management.

UB Law School's other new collaborative program combines law and public health studies leading to both a J.D. and an M.P.H. The program is run jointly with the Department of Social & Preventive Medicine in UB's School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

The collaboration reflects a trends in legal education and offers students a unique opportunity. UB Law program will be the only one of its kind offered in New York State, and one of only seven in the nation, says Sheila R. Shulman, clinical associate professor of Law and Social and Preventive Medicine, who is directing the program from the Law School's end.

"Students who are interested in health law, environmental or international issues will find a very good fit with the range of course content in the masters of public health program," says Shulman. She herself has both M.P.H. and L.L.B. degrees and teaches in the health law concentration.

Students will begin their training at the law school, adding public-health courses as they progress through years two and three. After earning their J.D., they will complete the requirements for the M.P.H. degree in residence at the department of Social and Preventive Medicine during the fourth year of the collaborative program. While at the Law School, students may select a concentration from among the 11 currently offered, deepening their expertise in a particular field. A new course in public health law will be added to the Law School curriculum. As part of the M.P.H. program, students must select one of two concentrations: biostatistics and epidemiology (the science of public health), or health services administration.

Shulman says the new program will prepare graduates for a broad range of opportunities in both the public and private sectors, including state and federal health agencies. Students interested in pursuing a career as a litigator will find a knowledge of epidemiology principles to be a valuable asset.

Shulman adds that the opportunity to earn degrees in law and public health may prove attractive to incoming students who have worked in another career before coming to law school, noting that recent UB Law classes have included physicians, nurses and other health professionals who want to broaden their career options.

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