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Double the punch

Improvements in the J.D./M.B.A. program make a good thing better



Left to right: School of Management Dean John M. Thomas '76, Law School Dean Nils Olsen and David E. Franasiak '78

A long-term marriage is only getting better, as the Law School and the University at Buffalo School of Management look to strengthen an already-successful series of academic collaborations. “The Law School and the School of Management have built, over the years, a collaborative educational experience,” said Dean Nils Olsen. “There has always been a very close relationship between the two schools.”

The efforts represent significant changes to the J.D./M.B.A. program, the most popular of the Law School’s many dual degree programs. And they come at a time when the marketplace increasingly demands graduates who are comfortable in both the legal and business worlds.

“More and more, the practice of law across the spectrum, from commercial practice to public interest, requires an

understanding and knowledge both of business and of legal principles,” said Dean Olsen. “This dual degree also enables even the lawyer who is going to work for a company to become very familiar with approaches that management takes. Equally important, it helps those who are going into management to better understand and utilize the services of counsel.”

One example of cross-pollination

outside the J.D./M.B.A. program is the Law School’s finance transactions concentration – essentially a cluster of courses about the art of the deal. Philip R. Perry, a School of Management associate professor, co-teaches some of those courses with his counterparts in the Law School. Likewise, a School of Management course in mergers and acquisitions is expected to enroll some law students. In the Law School’s course on financial transactions, 20 of the 80 class members are management students.

“I think we are very much ahead of the curve here when it comes to our peer institutions,” agreed Olsen’s counterpart, School of Management Dean John Thomas, himself a 1976 graduate of the Law School. “I have a lot of respect for this law school. They have an outstanding faculty.”

The J.D./M.B.A. program has been growing rapidly. In 2000, Thomas said, there were four J.D./M.B.A. students. Now there are 15, equal to 10 percent of the management school’s full-time MBA class. In the four-year J.D./M.B.A. program, all students spend their first year in the School of Management, their second year in the Law School, and then take a mix of courses in the final two years.

Changes in the works for the program center on three areas: administrative streamlining, academic enrichment, and an exciting initiative in New York City.

Administratively, the two schools are working to create a single, unified admissions application for the pro-

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The view from J.D./M.B.A. alumni

gram. Until now, applicants have had to complete a separate application for each school. In publicizing opportunities at UB, Thomas said, "We are looking to market this very much as a separate program." Additionally, a new position in the Law School's Career Services Office is expected to work with School of Management placement experts.

Academically, administrators and faculty at both schools are exploring ways to enrich the J.D./M.B.A. students' experience. It starts with making these ambitious students feel part of a group effort.

"We are working on different program enrichment activities to give the J.D./M.B.A. students a separate sense of identity," Thomas said. "We want them to be able to develop an identity as a group." Those activities may range from simple social events to a planned speaker series.

"We are working very hard to make it a unified program," Olsen said. "While they get two degrees, they are a member of a cohort that has directed their studies toward management and law. We want to have courses, curricular activities and placement directed specifically toward this group."

Also, said Law School Clinical Professor Thomas F. Disare, who is active with the program, "We want to explore creation of a capstone course – a course that challenges students to ask themselves, what do you know, where are you going? It will take on colloquium-type issues."

In addition, the schools plan a significant investment of time and energy in Science Technology Outreach, or STOR, which works to commercialize technologies developed at the University. The

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The J.D./M.B.A. program has been in place for the long haul. So how has the dual degree worked out for graduates? We asked some.

Susan Weber '89 was working in television news when she began an MBA program part time. She then decided to go to law school, quit the news business and spent three full-time years at UB earning the dual degree. Now she is a partner in the Chicago office of the international firm Sidley Austin Brown & Wood LLP, practicing "primarily product liability and consumer fraud litigation, with a large emphasis on pharmaceutical companies."

"Exposure to the management courses is enormously beneficial in helping to understand the perspective of large corporate clients and helping in-house counsel to address issues with their internal business plan," Weber said.

"When you are developing a litigation strategy, there are frequently aspects of that strategy that have to be sold to the business managers. And if outside counsel can anticipate the questions that are going to go to in-house people, then you can work together more effectively.

"Having some business courses is beneficial for young lawyers, too. Sometimes with new associates, the first time they are exposed to corporate reports, some of them panic."

Michael Rosenbaum '84 is a director of the international accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP in Atlanta.

"I wanted to have a career with a business or consulting firm, rather than something purely legal," he said. "The best way to have some credibility to initially start out was to also have the MBA degree. It also provided useful skills. I enjoyed tax law, so it was quite a natural thing to get my MBA in accounting.

"The Law School was a different per-

spective on how to come up with some answers. Much of accounting is rules-driven, whereas in law one can be somewhat creative and determine where there are paths you can go within the tax law that can benefit your client.

"People will stop by with issues or problems that have come up, and a lot of things are laid out in an accounting format of debits and credits. The fact that I understand what's going on, because of my MBA, helps the interaction."

Gary DeWaal '80, who is senior executive vice president and group general counsel of the Fimat Group in New York City, said, "The J.D./M.B.A. definitely was worth the extra year and the extra money. I remember in the winter of my third year thinking about not going forward, and really weighing it, because I was reluctant to not graduate with my colleagues. But ultimately I decided it was the right thing to do.

"I knew that it would make me more marketable. Academically, I was interested in both law and business. I was an undergraduate economics major, so the opportunity to marry law and business, for me, was invaluable.

"One of the values I bring to my work is remarkable credibility. When I speak to the lawyers, I speak as both a lawyer and a business guy; and when I speak to the business guys, I speak as both a business guy and a lawyer."

David Franasiak '78 is chief financial officer and a senior partner in Williams & Jensen in Washington, D.C., a policy firm that does lobbying on statutory and regulatory issues. The J.D./M.B.A., he said, is especially helpful in industries that are highly regulated, such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals and utilities, or the financial sector. "It helps you navigate not only the marketplace but also the laws and regulations that govern it," Franasiak said.

Also, he said, "If you want to go into pure policy, work in a think tank or academia, or you want to work for an international institution like the United Nations or a U.S. institution like the Federal Reserve, it is also extraordinarily helpful. You can really understand the intersection between the law and the marketplace.

"While we try to think like lawyers, we also very much try to think like business people."

Law School Report



Competitors in the Law School's trial competition program

Trial competition program

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teach them, it is basically practical application of the law. This gives them such a great tool in terms of coming out of law school and saying, 'I have been in a courtroom, I know my way around a courtroom.'

Also in Los Angeles, the UB Law team of Delesha Burton, Joshua Korode, Yadira Ramos and Dianne Thoben competed in the annual Tournament of Champions invitational, open to law schools with nationally recognized successful trial advocacy programs. Though the team did not advance, it competed against all four eventual semifinalists in the preliminary rounds.

UB Law's success in such competitions, Franczyk said, "really does build on itself. The point is not just to win competitions, though that enhances UB's reputation. The primary goal is to give law students the best opportunity we can to become great trial lawyers."

Closer to home, the on-campus Charles S. Desmond Moot Court Competition enjoyed another successful run last fall. The Desmond competition is the top oral advocacy competition open to second- and third-year law students. Students write an appellate brief

and present oral arguments on a case that is pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The competition case was based on *Johnson v. California*, looking at the California Department of Corrections' policy of segregating new prisoners by race for up to 60 days.

An astounding 28 teams competed. Allen Brenner, Buffalo Moot Court Board president, said that was as many teams as the last two years combined. After three nights of preliminary rounds, the quarterfinalist teams continued in Buffalo City Court.

The '04 finals were held in the Letro Courtroom on the first floor of O'Brien hall, before an active three-judge panel consisting of U.S. Magistrate Judge H. Kenneth Schroeder '61, New York Supreme Court Justice John M. Curran '84, and Robert B. Conklin '68.

Geoffrey Kaeuper and Leah Mervine, representing the petitioner, edged out Enam Hoque and Michael Mann for the top prize. Top oralist honors went to Lauren Cutuly; Jason Lee and Amber Storr won the award for best brief.

Improvements in the J.D./M.B.A. program

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schools are looking to create a program in technology entrepreneurship and commercialization, for which STOR would serve as the laboratory. "The goal is to assist the University to build successful tech start-ups," Thomas said. "We want to build this as an educational endeavor as well as one that benefits the mission of STOR."

But perhaps the most exciting initiative for the J.D./M.B.A. program will come not in Buffalo, but in New York City. It is there that the State University of New York is creating the Levin Graduate Institute, a new institution focused on providing SUNY students access to sophisticated international business and legal institutions situated in the New York City area. UB students in the J.D./M.B.A. program will be offered the chance to spend a semester at the Levin Institute studying international banking and finance, taught by UB Law and Management faculty in the world's financial capital. "This will give J.D./M.B.A. a unique dimension," Thomas said.

Added Olsen: "Buffalo is definitely not New York City when it comes to very sophisticated international finance and banking and legal transactions. The Levin Institute has for us the advantage of location and access to all the financial and political and legal leadership in the City of New York."

The new educational program is expected to include classroom lectures, team-based projects, panel discussions with practitioners, and company site visits. The program emphasizes analytic tools, cross-cultural skills and global perspectives.

The first J.D./M.B.A. students from Buffalo may begin studying there as early as this spring.