

April 6, 2014

Dorothy S. Landsberg
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University of the Pacific,
McGeorge School of Law

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University of the Pacific,
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Dear Dean Landsberg and Professor Colatrella:

We write to you in response to the recent announcement of a new course titled “The Legal Profession” with a focus on the “development of professionalism, professional identity, and career goals.” We are students that joined the SBA's Career Development Committee and have spent the spring semester reviewing the very challenges the new course seeks to address. Given that our goals overlap significantly, we wish to share with you our findings and recommendations and to request a meeting in the near future.

Right now, the school provides students a variety of opportunities to grow professionally such as mock interviews with alumni, issue-focused job fairs, an alumni mentor network, on-campus interviews with employers, and student club-lead networking events. These opportunities, however, encounter challenges from a variety of factors such as academic stress, low attendance, or students not being aware of events in time. These problems are not insurmountable by any means, but they will take both significant efforts to address and a collaborative effort between students, faculty, and the administration.

Please find attached to this letter a summary of our findings and suggestions on possible solutions. We by no means believe that we have found the perfect answer to every challenge, but rather submit them in order to begin a dialogue on how best to meet our shared goal of advancing student professional success. We are very interested in learning about the current proposals underway for the development of the Legal Profession course.

Advancing the professional successes of the student body underlies our decision to volunteer our time to the SBA Career Development Committee. We hope to supplement the efforts already underway to develop the curriculum with our current findings and with future discussions. We look forward to discussing this shared goal and related goals with you at a future date.

Sincerely,

SBA Career Development Committee

Memo

To: Dorothy Landsberg and Michael Colatrella

From: Amanda Kelly, Alexander Khan, and Ernesto Falcon

Subject: Career Development Committee findings and recommendations

Identified Challenges

While not an exhaustive list, we have narrowed down the core challenges that detract from students' ability to grow professionally as the following four items.

- Students adopt a professional mindset late in the academic process.
- 1st year is challenging academically, resulting in the neglect of professional development.
- Opportunities that school already presents go unutilized.
- A disconnect between McGeorge resources and the students exists.

The start of law school can be completely overwhelming. Many students feel like they are barely keeping their heads above water. Scared of failure, many focus solely on their studies and miss out on important opportunities. While recognizing that class work comes first, we also believe that a well-rounded education, with a strong focus on the future, should be the cornerstone of the McGeorge curriculum. Furthermore, we believe if students are pushed to explore the whole range of available opportunities then they will realize they can handle more than just their classes.

Connect the relevance of the educational experience with the legal profession

- Alumni who have recently graduated should be brought in early in the school year so they can give students context of why each course is relevant to the legal profession.

The student body comes from a plethora of backgrounds and motivations for going to law school. As a result, our familiarity with the legal field varies widely from student to student. One thing that is universal among students at McGeorge, however, is the desire to know in what ways each class is relevant to working as a lawyer. Often, the recognition that the course we are taking, despite its complexities and frustrations, is fundamental to employment provides the necessary motivation to persevere.

Because of the great importance of demonstrating relevance between the legal education and the professional field, we recommend close coordination with alumni who have recently graduated. The reason we emphasize recent graduates is because their memories of their school experience and ability to relate to students is still fresh.

Building core networking skills

- Basic networking skills are rarely self-taught and need to be part of the legal training.
- The PLSS/CDO mock mixer provide a useful template.
- Student clubs provide a host of networking opportunities but suffer attendance issues.

The hand shake, the first impression, asking for the business card, and the follow-up are all components of successful networking, but no one is born with these skills. Earlier this year, the Career Development Office in coordination with the Public Legal Service Society (PLSS) student club organized a mock mixer to help students gain these basic skills. Feedback from alumni and students indicated that this event was beneficial. Therefore, we believe some of the course curriculum dedicated to the fundamentals of networking would help provide students with an early foundation to becoming successful professionals. Simple exercises such as practicing their own “elevator pitch” can help students leave a lasting and positive first impression, which pays dividends when following up for job advice or job openings at a later date.

Related to the challenges of networking is the sporadic attendance student-led networking events encounter at different parts of the year. Part of this problem is the fact that attending a networking event is not part of the academic curriculum and as a result, the negative impacts on professional development can be ignored as they do not impact ones’ grade. While this cannot be solved exclusively by this course, an emphasis on attendance at a limited number of student networking events can help students obtain a more well-rounded professional training. Furthermore, the additional benefits of more students meeting more professionals is that more students increase their chances of finding fulfilling work when they graduate.

Help Students Plan

- Students are unaware of how best to manage their in academic year in regards to when to apply for summer internships, externships, and field placements.
- Knowing what jobs are available for 1st years is crucial.

For all of us, the first year came and pass at a blistering pace. The brisk pace of the school year makes planning for summer internships and the following year's employment prospects an unguided process. As a result, some students begin the job search for summer internships at a later time without realizing that the most opportune time to research and begin applications was *during and immediately following the winter break*. We recommend that the course focus on these critical times to start students down the right path before the spring semester's academic load absorbs student time.

Furthermore, a challenge that uniquely faces 1st year students is the narrowness of the job market given their lack of training in core classes such as evidence, constitutional law, and criminal procedure. Helping students understand what type of summer internships they are best suited for will ensure that their limited time and resources are spent efficiently.

Coordinate with CDO resources

- Many of CDO's resources are not intuitive and require some formalized introduction training.
- A resume and cover letter workshop is essential.

While perhaps outside the scope of the course, students have found that the CDO resources are difficult to integrate with their professional pursuits. The CDO does provide an introduction to

its resources but because student attention spans are limited as the semester progresses, the valuable information provided often gets lost. We think something interactive along the same line as our Westlaw, Lexis Nexis, and Bloomberg training may help students utilize the resources provided to them. Lastly, the CDO does offer resume and cover letter review resources, but these also go unutilized and could benefit as being part of the curriculum.

Conclusion

We submit our findings and recommendations to begin what we hope to be a series of discussions on how best to match the resources provided by the school to the needs of the student body. We do not hold to the belief that we have found the panacea to all the challenges facing the student body. By working together, however we are confident that we can achieve progress towards our shared goal of promoting the professional successes of the student body.