

REFLECTIONS ON BEING A LAW SCHOOL DEAN IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD

*Claudio Grossman**

AFTER reaching a certain level of momentum, a law school can pretty much run itself. Even in the absence of leadership, the law school will continue to function as it has in the past; students will come each year, and classes will be held. A sort of inertia results, in which nothing changes; things continue as they always have. Inertia is a dangerous thing in education, and it is the responsibility of the law school's dean to prevent it. A law school dean is charged with contributing to the development of a vision that will guide the law school in a positive direction. For this reason, one of my first steps when I became the Dean of American University's Washington College of Law (WCL) in 1995 was to define the goals of the institution. Establishing clear goals is crucial to keeping the law school community focused in a common direction and to providing us with inspiration and ample opportunity for reflection. In a decentralized law school environment, the only way a school can move forward is to ensure that everyone is aware of the institution's objectives and is contributing creatively to their development. To enable every member of the community to contribute to the fullest extent possible, it is essential to foster an open, participatory environment in which the means to achieve objectives are discussed and debated. At WCL, we have accomplished this through frequent faculty and senior staff meetings, where everyone is encouraged to share his or her point of view. WCL's administration has also cultivated a dynamic atmosphere where no idea or proposal is seen as too far-fetched to be considered. In this essay, I will share our institution's goals and some of the ways in which our community has sought to attain them. The goals we established for WCL are: (1) to break down barriers and build new relationships, internally and externally, at home and abroad; (2) to provide quality legal education that is centered on the student; (3) to create a renowned academic center addressing key issues of our time; (4) to develop a rich scholarly life; and (5) to make public service and *pro bono* activities a prominent part of WCL life. Below, I will touch briefly on each of these goals and how we have sought to implement them.

1. *To Break Down Barriers and Build New Relationships, Internally and Externally, at Home and Abroad*

This goal takes on new meaning in a global reality, in which even "domestic" lawyers will, at some point in their careers, address issues of international law. In such a reality, it is not enough for a law school merely to teach international law; students must learn to engage with people from other cultures and legal traditions and to resolve conflicts in this multicultural environment. At WCL, we have incorporated this multicultural model in many ways.

We allow our students numerous opportunities to study abroad in countries with different legal systems—and not just to take U.S. courses in these programs. They

* Dean and Professor of Law, American University, Washington College of Law.

study Israeli law in Israel, European Union Law in France and Switzerland, and Chilean law in Chile. Additional opportunities exist in Mexico, Canada, and Hong Kong. We encourage students who participate in study-abroad programs to supplement their classroom experience with an externship in a local law firm, court, or nongovernmental organization. Realizing that not everyone is able to study abroad, we have also created a multicultural environment within our own institution. For that purpose we bring visiting scholars from all over the world to teach at the law school.

We also have a tremendous wealth of diversity in our International Legal Studies LL.M. Program. More than 160 lawyers from over 60 countries participate in this program, giving J.D. students increased exposure to different legal traditions. J.D. and LL.M. students take classes and participate in extracurricular activities together, creating wonderful opportunities for exchange. Maintaining contact with international LL.M. graduates can also create a global network for academic and professional exchange. In fact, many of our former LL.M. students return to WCL and lend their expertise as visiting lecturers, adjunct faculty, and speakers at conferences.

Besides breaking down barriers between members of different nationalities, we have also broken down barriers along racial, ethnic, gender, and other lines. We created a full-time Office of Diversity Services (ODS), charged with the responsibility of ensuring the well-being of minority students and fostering an appreciation for diversity and a sense of community among all members of the student body, faculty, and staff. ODS was recognized this year by the American Bar Association as a program representative of best practices. A write-up on ODS appears in the *American Bar Association Resource Guide: Programs to Advance Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Legal Profession*. The write-up makes particular mention of our annual Sylvania Woods Conference on African Americans and the Law, the Minority Student Welcome that we hold each year for new minority students *during orientation*, and our Minority Affairs Advisory Group.

Recognizing that we still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality in our society and around the world, we also increased efforts to break down barriers along gender lines. During my tenure as dean, we created a Master of Laws (LL.M.) program specializing in Gender and International Law—the only program of its kind in the world. In addition to teaching about gender issues in the classroom, we became more dedicated to working for gender equality through new initiatives in our Women and International Law Program. We started the Transforming Women's Legal Status in Latin America Project, which seeks to address the problems of gender bias in Latin American legal systems and legal education traditions. It accomplishes this by fostering and supporting the work of Latin American legal scholars and women's rights advocates in an effort to integrate women's human rights into legal education and doctrine.

2. *To Provide Quality Legal Education That Is Centered on the Student*

WCL has enlarged its faculty, appointing 20 new full-time positions since 1995. These additions enabled us to renew our commitment to student-centered teaching with a current student-faculty ratio of 18.7:1, down from 27:1, increasing

opportunities for interaction between faculty and students. Additionally, each student in our first-year class takes one of his or her first-year courses in a section of 45 students, a unique offering in a school of our size. Unlike other large law schools, we also ensure that no class has more than 100 students. Personalized interaction with teachers is critical in today's world, since technology is rendering obsolete academic institutions that do not provide it.

At WCL, we are using technology to enhance student-teacher interaction rather than replace it. For example, our ABA-approved International Externship Program—the first program of its kind in the U.S.—uses technology to enable students to work in externship placements anywhere in the world, under supervision from WCL faculty. While at their field placements, the students communicate with their faculty supervisors and other students via distance-learning technology such as electronic mail and video conferencing, allowing them to share their experiences with the law and culture of their host countries. During the summer of 2000, students externed at the International Center for Trade and Development in Geneva, the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights in Cambodia, the Center for Women's Rights in Poland, and the Asia Foundation in Taiwan, among others.

Faculty are using technology innovations in regular courses as well. For example, Professor Daniel Bradlow is using Internet and teleconferencing capabilities in his class, *Selected Issues in International Business Law*. These technologies allow his students to conduct a negotiation of a simulated joint venture agreement with students at the University of Dundee, Scotland. We have also established “virtual blackboards,” a web-based distance learning technology which allows students on-line access to course materials and electronic communication with their instructors and fellow students.

We are also placing a renewed focus on the basics of legal education. One of the most exciting developments taking place at the law school is the revamping of our writing program. We are doing this to place greater emphasis on one of the most important skills a lawyer can have—writing. We created a full-time, tenure-track position to direct the new writing program, and we hired Penelope Pether, a legal educator of the first order, to bring this program to life. We also hired three full-time writing instructors: Susan Maxon Aldridge; Susan Thrower; and Arlene McCarthy. They each bring unique backgrounds, knowledge, and experience to what will be one of the most exciting new writing programs in U.S. law schools. For the first time, a large portion of our first-year class will be taught writing by full-time WCL faculty, increasing opportunities for students to consult with teachers individually. The scholarly and practical expertise that our new writing faculty bring to WCL will also allow us to become national leaders in developing writing across the curriculum.

We are implementing other innovations in our basic curriculum as well, realizing that we cannot teach law as we did in the past if we are to prepare our students for tomorrow's world. We are continuing an innovative program that was begun last year in one of our first-year sections. Faculty in the program team-teach the traditional courses to show students the connections between these subjects, which are normally taught in isolation from one another. The curriculum was supplemented with segments that included international law, intellectual property, environmental regulation, client interviewing and counseling, and legal history. I

am proud to be one of the teachers in the innovative section, teaching international law. By introducing first-year students to cases like *Paquete Habana*, decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1900, we show them the value of customary international law in domestic court decisions. This program has been so successful that the faculty is working together to extend it to an additional first-year section this year.

The constant changes in the world around us demand that WCL adapt its curriculum in order to reflect an ever-changing reality. Numerous new courses were introduced last year, such as Intellectual Property Law, Economic Regulation of Business, International Telecommunications, Expert Scientific Evidence, Global Corruption and the Rule of Law, Government Liability, Theories of Pedagogy, Comparative Trademark Law, and State Constitutional Law. New courses scheduled in the coming academic year include: Advanced Issues in International Business Transactions, Lobbying and the Legislative Process, Legal Aspects of Work and Parenting, Health Care Transactions, National Economic Policy, and Global Public Interest Practice.

3. *Create a Renowned Academic Center Where We Address the Key Issues of Our Time*

We continue to develop our reputation as a renowned academic center addressing key issues of our time, hosting and sponsoring numerous conferences, seminars, and symposia throughout the year, and especially during our annual Founders' Celebration in March and April. We do this to broaden our faculty's scholarship by exposing them to a wealth of different points of view. We also feel that it is essential for our students to participate in such programs, since hardly an issue or problem facing our society does not contain a legal component. WCL was founded over a century ago by two pioneering women—Ellen Spencer Mussey and Emma Gillette—who believed that knowledge of the legal system was a key to achieving equality in society. We hold the Founders' Celebration each year to honor their memory and to continue our commitment to using legal education to bring positive changes to society.

Last year's Founders' Celebration was the most successful ever, including 25 events that brought over 1000 visitors to the law school. We dedicated last year's Founders' Celebration to the theme of *pro bono* service, to focus the legal community's attention on this important aspect of the profession. Our Founders' conferences drew nationally and internationally recognized jurists and policy makers to WCL, including: U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshevsy; Former Independent Counsel Ken Starr; Judge Albert Sachs of the Constitutional Court of South Africa; Professor Charles Ogletree of Harvard University; Mrs. Thurgood Marshall; world-renowned child psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan; Kadar Asmal, the South African Minister of Education; Jerome Facher (attorney for Beatrice Foods in the case upon which *A Civil Action* was based); and D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams.

4. *To Develop a Rich Scholarly Life Within Our Institution*

We continue to encourage our faculty to engage in research and writing on issues that are shaping the society of the future. Our faculty publish in the most prestigious journals in their disciplines, author and edit widely-used legal textbooks and

treatises, and participate in the national and international arenas as experts, litigators, and consultants on cutting-edge legal issues. In addition to a monthly internal speakers' series for faculty, we also host a monthly external speakers' series that brings prominent outside scholars and experts to the law school to discuss contemporary legal issues in an open forum. Last year, for example, Professor Mathias Reimann of the University of Michigan School of Law, and Harvey James Goldshmid, General Counsel of the Securities and Exchange Commission, were among those participating in the program.

To further enrich the scholarly life of our institution, we recently established a Doctor of Juridical Science (SJD) program, and we plan to admit our first students this academic year. Candidates will work under the supervision of a committee of faculty members to produce a dissertation of publishable quality based on original research.

5. *To Make Public Service and Pro Bono Activities a Prominent Part of WCL Life*

An essential duty of every member of the legal profession is to address inequalities in society, both at home and abroad. A commitment to *pro bono* lawyering has always been a cornerstone of WCL's mission. We respect the right of every individual in our community to choose his or her own cause, but we encourage everyone to commit him or herself to some form of public service. With the dedication of the 1999-2000 academic year as the "Year of *Pro Bono*," WCL renewed and expanded upon this commitment by creating numerous exciting *pro bono* programs in the past year. For example, the Marshall Brennan Fellowship Program was begun with the support of the Arca Foundation and the families of late Supreme Court Justices Thurgood Marshall and William Brennan. Thirty students have committed their time, energy, and imagination by teaching Constitutional Law to D.C. public high school students and students at Oak Hill, D.C.'s juvenile corrections facility. "Linking Communities for Educational Success" (LINK), a student-initiated program, was founded to support the students and community of Johnson Junior High School in their pursuit of academic, social, and community development. LINK addresses these needs through a holistic approach that includes tutoring, mentoring, adult education, a scholarship fund, social activities, and acquisition of educational resources.

WCL's *pro bono* efforts reach far beyond the borders of the United States. Our faculty and students are active in supporting the research efforts of the War Crimes Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Students in our International Human Rights Law Clinic provide needed legal services to indigent refugees fleeing political persecution. They also represent individuals, families, or organizations alleging violations of recognized or developing human rights norms before various domestic and international tribunals. In the Joint Research Program in International Environmental Law—a partnership between WCL and the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)—students work as volunteers and research assistants to strengthen international environmental law, policy, and management throughout the world. These are just a few examples. Students are using their non-legal skills as well. For the second year in a row, a team of students planned an "Alternative Spring Break" in Honduras. Twelve students in 1999 and twenty-two students in

2000 traveled to the Santa Barbara region of northern Honduras, where they helped rebuild homes and other buildings destroyed by Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

During our annual Founders' Celebration, we hosted a number of events related to the theme of *pro bono*, and we focused on both local and global perspectives on public service. Conferences relating to this theme included "Poverty Kills: An International Conference on Poverty and Human Rights Law" and "Historical Perspectives on *Pro Bono* Lawyering."

We also created the Peter M. Cicchino Awards for Outstanding Advocacy in the Public Interest last year. Peter Cicchino was an Assistant Professor at WCL who joined our faculty in 1998 after a distinguished career in public service. He founded and directed the Lesbian and Gay Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center and served as a staff attorney for the ACLU. He died in July of 2000 after a prolonged illness, but we will continue to honor his memory through this award. The Peter Cicchino Award will be given annually to three persons: one to a current second- or third-year student; one to a graduate whose work is primarily in the United States; and one to a graduate whose work is primarily outside the United States or deals with international law. We hope that this award will call attention to the accomplishments and dedication of individuals like Professor Cicchino, who will encourage others—both locally and abroad—by their examples.

As we begin the 21st century, we are experiencing a deep transformation in our entire society. It is not "business as usual" for lawyers or for anyone. For example, the advent of the Internet and other communications technologies dramatically changed the world in which we live. The flow of information *has* drastically altered traditional barriers between societies and individuals. In today's world, hardly any problem can be solved by domestic action alone. As a result of this new reality, we must change the way we train lawyers, preparing them to practice in a world where traditional legal distinctions between domestic and international, and between various disciplines, are shifting.

At WCL, we have attempted to reconceptualize legal education for this new world reality through implementing the goals I have outlined above. I believe that our success in recent years is a result of a recognition of WCL's vision by applicants, students, and members of the legal profession.¹ We have clearly defined goals to provide guidance, and these have enabled us to move forward as an institution, rather than staying in the same place. As result, our law school is a fluid, changing entity that continues to be relevant even in a rapidly transforming world. I hope that the lessons we have learned will benefit others confronting the challenge of defining a vision and building an institution that is truly engaged with the world.

1. Since implementing these goals, WCL has seen an increase in applications. We had 5520 applications this year, a 19% increase over the past two years. Currently, one in 12 law school applicants applies to WCL. Our graduates are being recognized in the workforce as well: 97% of the class of 1999 was employed nine months after graduation.