

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

Law schools failing their clientele

Law schools need an attitude adjustment.

Their current educational platform is a near total failure and provides graduates with little, if any, practical knowledge.

The current system teaches students how to “think like lawyers,” but essentially ignores the obligation to teach them how to actually practice law. It is rooted in an archaic mindset that looks backward rather than forward.

Most law schools' curricula tend to ignore the realities of the business world and discourage students from using emerging technologies. Surprisingly, the incorporation and acceptance of emerging technologies, including social media, actually is discouraged in many cases.

As law schools rest on their laurels, relying on antiquated teaching techniques that do little to prepare students for the realities of law practice, the profession as a whole suffers.

In recent months, I've had many discussions with law students and recent graduates about this issue. Inevitably, whenever I speak with recent law school graduates they express a nearly universal feeling of being completely unprepared to practice law.

Many express consternation with their plight. Even attorneys who have been practicing law for a number of years as associates feel unprepared to venture out on their own.

One associate in a firm who has been practicing law for more than two years, had aspirations to start his own criminal defense practice, but indicated he felt he lacked the experience to do so.

His reluctance and anxiety are particularly disturbing given that, according to a recent study, nearly 80 percent of lawyers either are solos or practice in small firms. Most law schools ignore that reality and prepare students for the miniscule possibility they will spend their careers toiling away in Big Law.

As a result, future lawyers and practicing lawyers are virtually unanimous in their criticism of the current curricula and the teaching methods used.

When I asked my followers on Twitter for their opinions on the issue, most said they believe law schools simply are failing to pre-

pare students for the realities of law practice.

RWSJR: “Most of the people I know who went to law school in the early '90s no longer, or have never, practiced law. Expectations not managed.” — Ralph Smithers Jr., insurance professional and husband of a criminal defense attorney

SMungmung: “The Socratic system is not effective; shift of teaching strategies = right direction but still remains theoretical. Need more clinics!” — New York attorney

Jenslegalpad: “More practical classes. ... Sure we're all smart enough to figure it out on our own, but after \$90K in tuition, should we have to?” — Jennifer H. Bernstrein, New York

Shawnjroberts: “Law schools need to have required internships like med schools, to guarantee practical experience.” — Shawn J. Roberts, Oklahoma attorney

BabFab: “Project Management! Running a big litigation is all about PM. Law schools need to teach these skills.” — New York

DisabilityGuy: “I was told by new law students that using computers to take notes was strongly discouraged during orientation.” (Widener Law School) — Stephen Butler, Delaware attorney

“The job search process... is focused on the top 5 percent of the class. Few schools do a good job of catering to the rest of the class. ... [T]here are almost zero resources in the schools to help [students who want to start their own practices].” — Bobbi-Sue Doyle-Hazard, Massachusetts attorney

Overall, the consensus is that the current system is broken.

Until law schools drastically revise current curricula and their attitude toward change, the legal profession will suffer. Law schools need to radically alter the current philosophy in order to serve the needs of their clientele — the future leaders of our profession.

The failure to do so will be felt for years to come.

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Daily Record
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