



10 MOST PROMISING INNOVATIONS

IN LEGAL EDUCATION

and the schools behind them

Law schools have been on a creative tear in recent years. But not every innovative idea has been good enough to go mainstream. We identify the innovations that have the greatest potential to change legal education for the good and the schools that are behind them.

BY MIKE STETZ



INNOVATION has always been a bit of a hit or miss prospect. There's a reason iPhones flew off shelves. And there's a reason why spreadable beer probably won't. (Yes, it exists.)

Law schools have been innovating. Indeed, of late, they've been making Tesla engineers look like slackers. They've had little choice, given the changing legal market and the need to make students ready for these changes.

Search the Web (a pretty good innovation) and you'll find all sorts of innovations that law schools are attempting.

Here's a new one, for example: Cleveland State University, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law is the first law school in the nation to let students bail from a J.D. but still walk away with a degree. Students who decide after their first year that the J.D. is not for them can simply take one more course and earn a Masters of Legal Studies.

The law school's dean said it is one way the school is evolving. Will other schools follow suit? Should they? It's too early to tell.

But that's not the case with many of the innovative programs and policies that law schools have tinkered with in recent years.

We identify the 10 innovations that have gained momentum and have enough of a proven track record to warrant attention from prospective students.

All 10 innovations improve the law school experience but are still at only a handful of schools (from five to 55). So, before you finalize where to apply, consider the schools that offer these innovations.



1.

LIVE CLIENT GUARANTEE

Nearly every law school has jumped on the practical-training bandwagon in recent years. Many have opened new clinics or have made practical-training requirements even stricter than what the American Bar Association mandates, which is six credit hours.

In short, if you go to law school, you will be doing some sort of lawyering before you graduate. Schools upped such programs in response to criticism that they weren't producing practice-ready grads.

However, some schools have made more dramatic changes than others. Take University of Denver Sturm College of Law. Not only does it guarantee that students will participate in a year's worth of practical training, it also makes certain students will interact with real clients.



"Employers have told us repeatedly that they are looking for graduates who are ready to hit the ground running," said Dean Martin Katz when the program was announced last year. "We are already hearing from employers about how impressed they are with our students who have had the benefit of this type of learning. It provides our graduates with a significant advantage in the job market."

The first school to offer such a guarantee was Temple University in 1985. An additional 23 law schools require a clinic or externship.

David Santacroce, associate dean for experiential education at The University of Michigan Law School, said students should look for schools that guarantee a clinical experience taught by a faculty member.

"That's the gold standard," he said.



2.



SOLO OR SMALL-FIRM INCUBATORS

Not that long ago, there was no need for incubators. Law firms were the incubators. However, that's changed.

The recession dampened demand for legal services. And clients wanted more bang for their buck when they did need it, so they became more price conscious and picky. That resulted in layoffs and less hiring.

Before the recession, incubators were rare. City University of New York School of Law launched the first one at a law school in 2007, which was designed to

help young lawyers start solo practices to help the underserved.

When the legal market tanked, other schools looked at the incubator model as a way to help recent grads get started. Most schools offer free or cheap office space and seasoned attorneys to act as mentors. In return, the newly minted lawyers devote a portion of their time to serving the disadvantaged.

Incubators have been growing rapidly.

“Incubators have shown to be very sustainable.”

—Fred Rooney, Touro Law Center



Law Schools with incubators



Arizona State University
California Western School of Law
Cardozo School of Law
Chapman Fowler School of Law
Charlotte School of Law
Chicago-Kent College of Law
Cleveland-Marshall College of Law
Florida International University
Hofstra University
Loyola University New Orleans
Mississippi College School of Law
Pace University

Roger Williams University
Rutgers School of Law – Newark
Seattle University
Thomas Jefferson School of Law
Touro Law Center
University of Arizona
University of Detroit Mercy
University of Massachusetts
University of Memphis
University of Missouri – Kansas City
University of Tulsa
University of Utah
Wayne State University
Whittier Law School
Widener Commonwealth Law

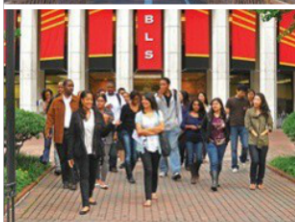
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Today, the ABA lists more than 30, and the numbers are expected to grow.

Fred Rooney, the father of the legal incubator who still helps schools create them, believes they are here to stay. For one thing, the job market for young attorneys does not — nor is it likely to — match pre-recession strength, said Rooney, who is now director of Touro Law Center's International Justice Center for Post-Graduate Development. That means more grads will be looking at solo or small practices as options.

And — despite claims to the contrary — they are attractive ones, he said. You get to be your own boss. You can build your practice to your liking.

Additionally, the legal services gap will grow if income inequality trends continue, he said. So the need will continue.

“Incubators have shown to be very sustainable,” he said.

If anything, incubators are getting more ambitious. In California, three more are set to open. St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens, Fla. will also unveil one soon.

3.

ACCELERATED LAW DEGREES

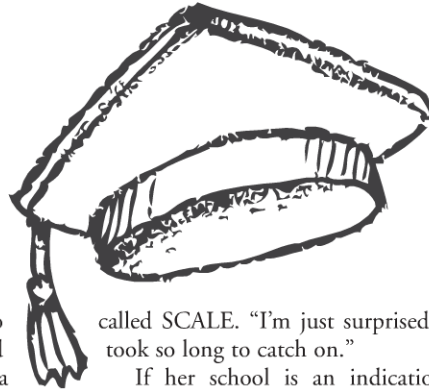
While there's been significant debate as to whether law school should be shortened to two years — even President Obama thinks so — that hasn't happened yet, and it might never.

The three-year model remains the norm. However, a growing number of schools are condensing that into two-year programs by having students use the full calendar year. They take the same number of credits but in a shorter period of time.

Nearly 20 schools now offer accelerated programs. Normally, the tuition price is about the same, but students don't have to pay for an extra year of living expenses and they hit the job market a year earlier — pretty powerful incentives.

While most programs are relatively new, Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles has offered this option since 1974.

"I'm not shocked by the increase in schools doing this," said Harriet Rolnick, associate dean for the program, which is



called SCALE. "I'm just surprised it took so long to catch on."

If her school is an indication, this innovation has staying power. It's been popular since its inception, she said. She's headed it for the past 10 years and has made a number of key changes, including adding a summer semester that offers students the chance to take externships, summer abroad programs or elective classes. That kind of experience can be key for students, she noted.

"It's absolutely not a slimmed-down version of law school," she said.

Given the demands of the program, students who gravitate toward it tend to be driven and ambitious, she said. They also normally perform better on the bar, she said.

New York Law School started a two-year program this year — with an added bonus. The cost will be no more than two-thirds of a traditional J.D. at the school.

Law Schools with accelerated degrees



Arizona State University
Brooklyn Law School
Creighton University
Drexel University Kline School of Law
Florida Coastal School of Law
Gonzaga University
Northwestern University
Pepperdine University
Regent University
Southwestern Law School
Touro Law Center
University of Dayton
University of Kansas
Vermont Law School
Washburn University

That's because it's an honors program and comes with a scholarship worth at least \$50,000.

"New York Law School is the first law school in the nation to reduce the cost of tuition for an accelerated program by a third," the school said.

Elon University School of Law shortened its program from the traditional three years to two and a half years to allow students to enter the job market sooner. The new curriculum, which starts this fall, also features 20 percent practical training.

4.

TUITION GUARANTEES

It's well known that law schools have faced a range of challenges during the past years, not all of their own doing. The Great Recession? That was fueled by a housing/finance collapse. However, arguably, one thing is on them: Law school prices have gone up. A lot.

As enrollment climbed in the heydays, a number of schools paid top dollar for expanding faculties and support staff and went on building binges. They raised tuition. And then they raised it more.

But a number of schools are using innovative techniques to make legal education more affordable. Brooklyn Law School announced a 15 percent rollback in tuition that starts this fall.

School President and Dean Nick Allard said the school hopes to "demonstrate that we can break away from the broken model

that exists now."

Brooklyn, which had given out more in scholarship funds than any other law school, will offer fewer merit scholarships to make the program work.

"What we want are the highest qualified students who fit with us and are motivated to take advantage of our special offerings," Allard said. "We're not going to throw money at some artificial rankings. As far as I'm concerned, the U.S. News rankings may be good for lining the cage of a parakeet, but as a road map for students, they're not useful."

Brooklyn is one of at least 13 schools that offer a tuition guarantee, providing students with the assurance that their tuition rate will stay the same throughout their enrollment.

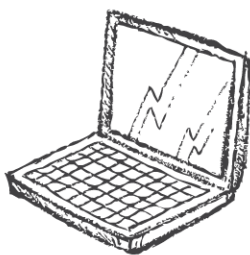


Tuition guarantees



Appalachian School of Law
Brooklyn Law School
Elon University
Mississippi College School of Law
Roger Williams University
University of Akron
University of Detroit Mercy
University of Illinois
University of La Verne
University of St. Thomas - Mn.
Villanova Law
Western New England University

5. ONLINE CLASSES



Law school from home? It's a reality with the ABA's approval of William Mitchell College of Law's hybrid, on-campus, online J.D. program. The four-year program requires students to come to the St. Paul, Minn., campus for 10 weeks to undergo practical

training.

The rest of the class work? It's online.

The hybrid, which started this year, has attracted students from 30 states and two nations. This innovation is likely to continue to soar as technology improves and schools create curriculums to take advantage of the advances.

Landing a J.D. still requires that much of the work be done in a brick-and-mortar setting. The ABA only allows for 15 semester hours to be done online. William Mitchell College of Law allows for nearly 50 percent of it to be done so.

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However, landing an LL.M. is becoming easier to do via distance learning from a growing number of law schools. About 30 of them have LL.M. programs. A good number of them can be done entirely online.

Additionally, some schools are sharing online offerings, so students from other law schools can participate in popular, in-demand classes.



6. BAR PREP PROGRAMS

If you want to practice law, graduating from law school is merely the first step in the process. You must also pass the bar exam. And that's hardly a given. In California, in the most recent bar exam, fewer than 50 percent passed.

That's why more schools have started innovative prep courses to help students prepare for the bar.

Some schools place an emphasis on bar preparation even among first-years, stressing to students how important the test will be to their futures.

Not only is bar passage vital for grads, it's important for schools. A school's ABA standing can be threatened by poor bar exam performance, and it can lose students to other schools.

Western State College of Law in Fullerton, Calif., has an innovative program that pushes students to excel — they must earn a 2.5 GPA — in a number of bar-related courses.

The result? In the most recent exams, 77 percent of first-time test-takers passed, 6 percent above the state average.

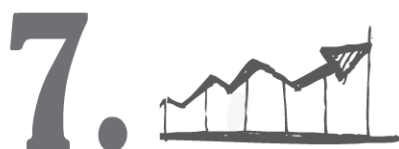
Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio, used to have one of the lowest bar passage rates among Ohio schools. When the ABA allowed schools to offer a for-credit bar prep course, Capital did so immediately.

In 2008, after a few short years, the school rocketed to the top with a 94 percent pass rate, said Yvonne Twiss, professor of bar services.

"Certainly, now, a lot more schools see the value," she said.

Other schools that offer bar prep courses include Appalachian School of Law, Pace University School of Law, University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law, The John Marshall Law School, Whittier Law School,

Chapman University Fowler School of Law, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, and Roger Williams University.



BUSINESS LITERACY PROGRAMS

In 2011, The New York Times published a story noting how recent law school grads were being stumped by basic business questions such as:

“How do you get a merger done?”

They were so clueless they had to be schooled by the law firms that hired them to learn how to do their jobs.

Law schools, very red in the face, responded. Brooklyn Law School, for one, started a Business Boot Camp, in which students get intensive training to learn the language and nuances of business. Business and finance professionals teach it with assis-

tance from Brooklyn Law School staff.

The three-day boot camp’s innovative technique was the subject of a New York Times story earlier this year, which also noted similar programs now taking place at other law schools.

“The only question I had is: ‘Why haven’t law schools done it before?’” said Nick Allard, president and dean of Brooklyn Law School. “It’s been a tremendous success, well beyond our expectations.”

The boot camp, now three years old, has attracted an average of 200 students per session, Allard said. That number is pretty amazing given the boot camp is held during winter break when students are off, he said.

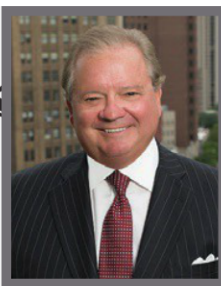
This is a tool that students who want to start their own practices or are interested in nonprofit work find attractive, he added. They want to know the ins and outs of business, because it applies to their worlds.

Other schools are highlighting similar programs. At Fordham University School of Law, all first-year students are required to take a course that introduces them to basic financial concepts, such as supply and demand.

Other schools that offer business litera-

“It’s been a tremendous success, well beyond our expectations.”

—Nick Allard,
Dean,
Brooklyn Law
School



cy programs include: Cornell Law School, University of Maryland, Yale Law School, Boston University, New York University and Harvard Law School.

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TECHNOLOGY OF LAW

A growing number of law schools are taking the initiative to better understand how technological changes are affecting law and to prepare law students for them.

“Any law school that ignores technology training does so at its own peril,” said Andrew Perlman, dean and director of the Institute on Law Practice Technology and Innovation at Suffolk University Law School in Boston.

The law school started that institute in 2013 after seeing an increasing use of new technology in the legal field. Private companies, such as LegalZoom, are offering legal services on the Web and normally at lower costs than private attorneys. Indeed, LegalZoom is hardly a newcomer; it was started in 2001.

So the need to get on board is becoming more imperative, Perlman said. And that need is being recognized. When Perlman suggested creating a legal technology and innovation concentration at his school, the faculty voted unanimously to approve it.

Students learn about technology and how it can affect legal services and how to use it to their advantage. Just one of the innovations the institute has created is a mobile app to help Massachusetts lawyers find a range of legal resources at the push of a button.

There are 57 law schools that offer a concentration in technology. But some stand out from the pack. Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Institute of Technology has the longest history of focusing on technology. Brigham Young University - J. Reuben Clark Law School has offered courses since the 1980s.

Hofstra University, Maurice A. Deane School of Law has created a capstone course to train students about the latest legal technology. It's been a leader in this area, having established its Law, Logic & Technology Research Laboratory in 2009.

Other leaders include: Michigan State University College of Law, University of Pittsburgh School of Law, Vermont Law School, Georgetown University Law Center, Columbia Law School and Florida Coastal School of Law.

9. ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT



If a law school wants to make grads practice ready, a good way to do that is to train them for roles in the new economy — such as working with start-ups.

“We have an underserved population here,” said Laura Norris, director of the

Entrepreneurs’ Law Clinic at Santa Clara University School of Law. “They don’t have the money or access to legal services.”

The school is located in the heart of Silicon Valley, where a lot of start-ups are looking to start up. But it’s not just tech companies being hatched. People are starting all sorts of new businesses and need legal help in doing so.

A number of law schools have started such clinics. Penn State Law, for instance, is opening one this fall.

Law schools are well-positioned to help. If they are associated with a sister university, students and researchers in other disciplines are a source of clients, given that the work they do could lead to marketable innovations.

Businesses may need a host of help, from intellectual property counseling to knowledge of government regulation that apply to them, she said.

Law schools with a concentration in entrepreneurial law

Duke University
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles
Pepperdine University
Saint Louis University
Santa Clara University
University of Colorado
University of Missouri
University of Missouri – Kansas City
University of Oklahoma
Villanova University
Western New England University



10.

LEGAL WRITING



Of all the under-rated skills a lawyer needs, writing might be near the top. After all, law schools were built upon the premise of teaching students to “think like a lawyer.” Not write like a lawyer.

But writing skills are finally getting their due as a growing number of schools are putting more emphasis on the skill and are hiring experienced, innovative professors.

Writing is essential to lawyering, said Michael Smith, director of legal writing at University of Wyoming College of Law. When he holds orientations for new students, he tells them to dismiss the notion that the bulk of their work will be in the courtroom. That’s TV’s version. Nope. You’ll be writing.

In the past, many schools used adjuncts to do such teaching. Tenure-track positions were rare. That’s changing as law firms demand better skill sets from grads.

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