

**A Sequenced Program to Create Access to the Legal Profession
and Educate Professionals for Public Interest Practice**

The CUNY School of Law's dual mission—to provide access to the profession for historically underrepresented groups and to graduate outstanding public interest lawyers—shapes our curriculum, pedagogy, academic policies, hiring, admissions, career services, and culture.

Our access mission and an appreciation for diverse communities creates a diverse student body and one of the most diverse faculties in the country. Our current first-year class is 43% students of color, and 35% of our tenured and tenure-track faculty members are people of color. Our public interest mission ensures that almost two-thirds of our graduates go directly into public interest or public service practice, a greater percentage than any other law school in the country.

Core Program

Our academic program is designed to insure that our students graduate fully prepared for practice with the doctrinal knowledge, critical theory, practical skills, and ethics necessary for excellent public interest practice. Our curriculum integrates theory and practice from the first day of the first year of law school and continues throughout the three years in a coordinated, sequenced program that culminates in a 12-16 credit required clinical experience.

Our program revolves around the competencies, habits, and values surfaced by the 1992 report of the ABA Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession, commonly known as the *MacCrate Report*. Every CUNY Law student receives individualized supervision (in groups ranging from 8 to

20 students) in 20 required credits of lawyering and clinical courses. The lawyering curriculum enables students to see that legal problems emerge within the context of clients' complex lives and that a lawyer's work extends beyond simply understanding the subject matter. In these courses, each student receives a narrative evaluation in six competencies: professional responsibility, clinical judgment, legal reasoning, theoretical perspective, communication (oral and written), and management of effort. Faculty design incrementally more sophisticated and demanding learning goals throughout the three years of the lawyering program. This evaluation framework, combined with standard grading practices in our substantive courses, insures a fully rounded preparation for practice.

Our focus on public interest practice has led us to add several courses to our required curriculum, in addition to the traditional fare: a constitutional law course on liberty, equality, and due process in the first semester, family law in the second semester, and administrative law in the second year.

We aim to develop professionals who, throughout their careers, reflect on and learn from their experiences, recognize the law's relationship to the social, economic, and political context in which it operates, and practice with concern for the responsibilities commensurate with their privilege.

Teaching and Learning at CUNY School of Law

Our goal is to create a culture of engaged learning focused on the development of each student for a lifetime of successful practice. To that end, we intertwine the traditional modes of law school instruction with two core pedagogies that are especially effective for adults: experiential education and peer learning. For instance, in addition to the evaluation of independent student effort on timed exams, we teach and encourage collaboration.

A well-resourced (3 FTE for 450 students) academic support program provides assistance to all

first-year students and to upper-class students who are struggling, as well as to our graduates preparing for the Bar Exam. Our faculty draws on the expertise of our academic support professionals as resources for teaching methods.

Our Legal Writing Program is sequenced over the three years and integrated into our lawyering program, and it augments our Moot Court and Law Review programs. Since our faculty members teach both in the lawyering program and in the substantive courses, we have been able to incorporate emerging theories about writing across the curriculum into non-writing classes. In addition to a director and an assistant director, the professional staff of our Legal Writing Program includes three Ph.D. candidates, non-lawyer writing instructors who work with our students on standard aspects of good writing (e.g., grammar, punctuation, syntax, attention to voice).

A number of our teaching and academic policies demonstrate a focus on student development. For example, no course grade at CUNY Law rests on a single test. We try to give copious feedback or score sheets in connection with returned, graded work. We use practice exam questions in classes, and we pay attention to insuring that we teach what we test (including exam organization and issue spotting). In recognition that students enter with different levels of preparation, our first-semester grades, while counted for academic standing purposes, do not appear on student transcripts, and our transcripts include neither class rank nor cumulative grade point averages.

Pipeline to Justice

Teaching a student to assume the professional role of an attorney requires instilling an enduring commitment to justice. At CUNY School of Law, the first part of our mission is to diversify the legal profession. We do not value diversity because it enhances the education of majority students; we value diversity because rectifying the legal, social, and financial exclusion of racial minorities from the profession itself is a form of justice. As stewards of the future of the

profession, whom we choose to admit to our schools not only enhances or diminishes the possibility of justice in underserved communities but also instructs our students about who we believe should be entitled to wield the authority of the law. We cannot separate teaching legal ethics and professional role assumption from how we select and support our students.

External pressure to improve our students' entering indicators and our graduates' success on the Bar Exam challenged us with the specter of diminished diversity in our student body. In response, we developed an innovative Pipeline to Justice Program. The Pipeline to Justice selects students whom we rejected for admission primarily on their quantitative indicators. It then provides these students with a comprehensive course in analytic thinking, logic, and LSAT preparation, followed by a course in critical reading and professional-level writing skills to prepare them for the rigors of law school. During the LSAT portion of the course, the focus is not only on test preparation, but also on building the reading, analytic, and logic skills that contribute to success on both the test and in law school.

The Pipeline to Justice also provides individualized, non-academic counseling focused on test anxiety, self-esteem, and managing complex life circumstances that may contribute to weaker standardized test performance. Throughout the course, students are coached in meta-cognitive awareness, self-efficacy, and pro-active academic strategies designed to support their work throughout law school. With successful completion of the program and an increase in their LSAT scores above a target, Pipeline students are granted admission to the Law School the following year.

Now in its second year, the Pipeline to Justice saw two-thirds of its pioneer class, which showed an average 4.5 point increase on the LSAT (10 students improved 7 or more points), become first-year law students. Seventy-seven percent of these students are students of color, and 64% come from the populations most underrepresented in the profession, blacks and Latinos. In one year,

the Pipeline to Justice improved the diversity of our entering class by 20%. All but one of those students have now successfully completed the first semester.

Even in this pre-law school program, there is a focus on professional role assumption, which leverages the students' motivation, communicates our confidence that they can become members of the profession, and reminds them that the skills and knowledge they are about to learn are not just academic exercises. The first night of the Pipeline to Justice course asks groups of students to imagine they are a law firm and to describe the communities they will serve, the kind of law they will practice, the adjectives they would like used to describe their efforts, and the non-legal skills they already possess that will enhance their ability to represent their clients. This assignment not only allows students to connect their aspirations to the skills and values they possess and will acquire, but also begins the process of integrating personal and professional skills with values.

Community Legal Resource Network

The second part of our mission is to prepare our students for public interest practice. In the words of our motto, we aim to create lawyers who will practice “law in the service of human needs,” providing access to justice for those who would otherwise be unrepresented. We do not achieve our mission unless we support our graduates who are opening practices in underserved communities. As a result, CUNY School of Law continues to promote the development of professional skills, habits, and values beyond the three-year curriculum through our Community Legal Resource Network (CLRN). CLRN supports our alumni who, determined to serve even those underrepresented communities who are beyond the reach of traditional poverty legal service providers, have opened solo and small firm practices operating on a sliding scale and reduced fee basis in these communities.

Since 2001, CLRN has been weaving these graduates into practice groups (e.g., Family Law, Immigration Law, Labor and Employment, etc.), utilizing technology to create a virtual law firm, the

benefits of which include in-person support groups, tailored CLE courses, and on-line listservs. For example, when a CUNY Law graduate returns to the Dominican immigrant neighborhood to which she herself immigrated to begin a solo practice, she has access through a CLRN group subscription to Lexis and Nexis, as well as access through the CLRN listserv, to hundreds of other CUNY Law School alums, many of whom are experts in a range of areas that are new to her. In addition to support in developing legal knowledge and easy access to advice on developing options and making strategic choices, CLRN helps new lawyers in community-based practices throughout the city to deal with the issues inherent in such practices: isolation, financial pressure, and developing solid business plans and practices.

CLRN recently launched an ambitious new initiative (profiled in the *New York Times* on January 9, 2008) – an incubator project providing training for solo practitioners in all aspects of establishing a new practice from finding clients and establishing sound accounting procedures to developing good employment practices and obtaining malpractice insurance. The six new lawyers, each of whom embarked on solo practice, pay a low monthly rent in a Manhattan office occupied by a senior lawyer who started her own practice more than a dozen years ago and has taught a Small Firm Practice course at CUNY Law for almost a decade. That senior lawyer and several other small firm practitioners who are also alums will mentor and guide these new lawyers for 18 months as they begin their practices.