

Should Law School Offer More Practical Legal Training?

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JoAnne A. Epps, Dean of Temple University Beasley School of Law, writes an excellent and quite interesting article questioning existing law school conventions and how practical training could be incorporated into the standard curriculum.

Read the entire article at [The National Law Journal](#)...

A tipping point for law schools?

It's time to reassess how lawyers are taught and specifically consider whether more practical training is needed.

by JoAnne A. Epps

Few professions have been spared in the current economic crisis, with the business of law unquestionably among the most affected. As firms conduct mass layoffs for the first time in history and client frustration over billing structures hits new peaks, we may have reached a tipping point. It goes without saying that the fates of law schools and law firms go hand in hand, so perhaps this is an ideal time for academia and practitioners to come together to question, evaluate and reassess the way lawyers are trained.

During much of the past century, lawyers learned a great deal about the practice of law — the skills of interpersonal relationships and client development, and strategies to excel in negotiations, for example — more from observation while practicing law than in law school. As a result, law schools were free to focus on the theoretical — the erudite intellectual debate — and were not required to provide instruction on skills such as drafting interrogatories or subjects such as organizational psychology. I suspect we are past the time for this model to change.

Clients are refusing to underwrite the training of new lawyers and are demanding that their matters be handled by experienced lawyers. This obviously raises the question of where our next generation of attorneys will gain that experience.

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Temple University Beasley School of Law has long prided itself on blending theory and practice in a way that we believe gives our graduates a competitive advantage in the marketplace. We offered some of the first legal clinics and simulation courses in the nation, programs that are now ubiquitous. Along with our extensive externship program, every student is provided the opportunity for experiential learning.

Yet, like many law schools, Temple has embarked on an ambitious plan to re-evaluate our upper-level curriculum. In 2007, we established a corporate clerkship program to give students hands-on experience in corporate legal departments. We are also considering partnering judges and practitioners with professors to offer courses that blend high-level theory with current insights from the field.