

Association of American Law Schools
Section on Part-Time Division Programs
Newsletter

Volume 4

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Annual Meeting Program

Greetings! The Section on Part-Time Division Programs has planned an interesting, interactive program for the Annual Meeting titled **“Mission Possible: Launching a Full-Time Legal Career from a Part-Time J.D. Program.”** Additional information about the program and speakers appears in the article below. We hope you will join us at **10:30 a.m. on Saturday, January 5, 2008**, to engage in the dialogue about how we can best assist our part-time students to launch their legal careers.

Section Election at the Annual Meeting

Also, please remember that a business meeting, which will include the election of officers and executive committee meetings will follow immediately after the January 5 section. If you are interested in becoming more involved with the Section, please e-mail me at darby@law.stetson.edu before December 30. Or, simply stay for the meeting and express an interest at that time.

Part-Time Student Survey

Two ongoing questions the Section has been exploring for several years are **“Who are part-time students?”** and **“Are we serving them well?”** Although we all have statistics from our own schools and anecdotal stories from our own students, we do not have much empirical research on these issues. In an effort to fill this gap, the Section has been working on a “Survey for Part-Time Students.”

With regard to the survey, we need your help in three ways. First, if you or your school has the resources and expertise to help administer the survey to a national audience, and to compile and start reviewing the data, we need you! Second, if you might be interested in administering the survey at your school (subject to approval from your school’s Institutional Research Board), we would love to provide you with a survey that you can adapt for your purposes. Third, we plan to establish a Survey Subcommittee and are looking for energetic and creative volunteers. If you are interested in serving the Section in any of these ways, please contact me at darby@law.stetson.edu.

Stetson Beta-Version Survey

In Spring 2007, Stetson University College of Law administered a beta version of the survey to our part-time students. Stetson's part-time program is relatively new, and is unique in that students take some evening courses at a satellite campus in downtown Tampa, but take most courses at our main campus in Gulfport/St. Petersburg. The results of the survey have been helpful for planning purposes, and have confirmed our hunches on many matters. Of course, we also found a few surprises within the results.

Below are some of the things we learned from the 80-question survey. About one-half of the students returned the surveys.

- ❖ Most of our part-time students work between 33 and 40 hours a week, although some work more, and a surprising number work 20 hours or less.
- ❖ Most indicated that they either never miss class (30 out of 105 responses) or miss either 1 or 2 classes (48 out of 105) per semester. The results indicate that when a part-time student misses a class, it is almost always because of a work or family conflict, as opposed to another reason, such as not being prepared.
- ❖ Most part-time students rarely have an opportunity to eat a meal before classes begin, although about half typically can grab a snack.
- ❖ The slight majority "always" use a laptop in class.
- ❖ Most attended college full-time, as opposed to part-time.
- ❖ Slightly more than half have earned another graduate degree.
- ❖ Virtually all plan to sit for a bar examination following graduation.
- ❖ About one-third plan to work full-time while studying for the bar, about one-third do not plan to work full-time, and about one-third are uncertain about how much they will work, if at all.
- ❖ The vast majority plan to practice law after graduation, with 22 out of 105 planning to stay with their current employer.
- ❖ Few work for employers with tuition matching or reimbursement plans (15 out of 105).
- ❖ A significant majority "have participated in or . . . plan to participate in" an internship, externship, clinic, or similar program (73 out of 105).
- ❖ About half had already participated in pro-bono opportunities while in law school.

- ❖ Most communicate with professors via email or text message (97 out of 105), but many try to see the professor before or after class without an appointment (30) or make an appointment to see the professor (32). Only 3 indicated they visit professors during office hours.
- ❖ Most study for class on weekends (82), on days without class (70), or right before class (50). Few study right after class (19). Most study at home (74) versus school (28) or work (5).
- ❖ A majority (63 out of 105) “usually” use vacation time to complete large projects or to prepare for and take final examinations.
- ❖ On whole, they felt like the faculty are accessible and treat part-time students with respect, although results were mixed on whether faculty treat them differently than full-time students.
- ❖ Results to the question “Law school is more difficult than I thought it would be” were spread almost equally among the “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neutral,” and “disagree” choices. Only one person “strongly disagreed.” A similar spread occurred on the question “Law school is more time-consuming than I thought it would be.”
- ❖ Seventy-three would “recommend that others consider attending law school on a part-time basis.”
- ❖ Eighty-four either agreed or strongly agreed that “[a]ttending law school on a part-time basis is worth the financial cost and other sacrifices.”

Based on the responses to the survey, we have made a variety of changes, and are considering others. As just a few examples, we changed the type and variety of food available in our Tampa Law Center, which does not have a cafeteria and also offer fruit and granola bars at no charge in the Tampa library. We also are planning to change the start time of the first class by 15 minutes in light of the number who indicated that they do experience traffic issues. We also have adjusted departmental hours and are in the process of upgrading a wide variety of web-based services for all students. We also are looking for ways to increase the interaction between part-time and full-time students.

In sum, while the survey certainly is not a substitute for getting to know our students individually, it did help us learn information about the group as a whole and to obtain information that the students might have been reluctant to provide in focus groups or other face-to-face sessions. Based on our experience, I highly recommend that other dual-division schools consider administering a survey to part-time students on a regular basis.

Thanks for providing me with the opportunity to serve the Section this year. I look forward to hearing from you and seeing you in January!

*Darby Dickerson
Vice President and Dean
Stetson University College of Law
Gulfport/St. Petersburg and Tampa, Florida*

**2008 AALS ANNUAL CONFERENCE
New York, N.Y.**

Section on Part-Time Division Programs Presents:

Mission Possible:

Launching a Full-Time Legal Career from a Part-Time J.D. Program

A perennial challenge for dual-division law schools is how to provide a wide range of career opportunities for graduates from the part-time program. This session will address myriad issues associated with this challenge, including marketing part-time students to law firms and organizations, developing creative alternatives to summer clerkship programs, advising part-time students on career opportunities, helping part-time students translate prior experiences into skills valued by legal employers and prepare resumes focused on legal careers, counseling nontraditional students about legal markets, and assisting students who desire to pursue alternative careers. Participants on this interactive panel include an experienced director of career services from a school with a significant part-time program, a law firm representative, and a recent graduate from a part-time program.

Program Time: Saturday, January 5, 2008, 10:30 a.m.

PANELISTS

Caroline Fabend Bartlett

Associate

Patton Boggs, LLP ~ Newark, N.J.

Ms. Bartlett successfully negotiated the transition from business to law practice through the part-time program at Seton Hall University. Her experiences in law school included a law firm summer associate position and she served as a judicial clerk in the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey for three years following her completion of law school in 2004.

Sheila Driscoll

Assistant Director and Evening Division Counselor

Career Development Office

George Washington University Law School

As evening division counselor for a part-time division comprising 270 students (2006), Ms. Driscoll has counseled hundreds of law students and alumni as they navigate the legal job search process. Before joining George Washington, Ms. Driscoll was a recruiter for a legal placement firm and a litigation attorney for a large law firm in Boston, Mass.

MODERATOR:

Frederic White, Dean

Golden Gate University School of Law

Dean White is the chair elect of our section.

Guest Column by:

Rhonda V. Breassie

Assistant Dean of Career Development and Assistant Clinical Professor
University of Houston Law Center

Your Mission: Incorporating the Career Needs of Evening Students

Evening students make a significant sacrifice to balance studies, work, and frequently more “adult” responsibilities such as families and mortgages. Clearly, part-time students have a variety of goals for pursuing legal education and many are not concerned with changing careers. That may be one reason the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) statistics show thirty percent of evening student graduates remain employed with their pre-law school employer.¹ For most however, a legal job is the reward sought for forfeiting free and family time for four years. With appropriate planning, marketing, and exposure to legal markets, night students can effectively transition to legal positions. Indeed, NALP reports sixty-six percent of part-time law graduates were employed in firms, clerkships, government or public interest employers within nine months of graduation.² This article considers strategies career offices can employ to assist evening students on a legal job search mission.³

The Basics; Information on Demand and Just in Time Counseling

Like traditional students, part-time students must become knowledgeable about the legal market. This is most easily accomplished through access to counseling, electronic media, and informational programming. With part-time students juggling a difficult schedule, schools should make information available in a location and at a time when students can retrieve it on their timetable. In today's age, that location is the internet. Career offices should have a link specifically for part-time students listing contact information for assigned career advisors, articles of interest, handbooks and downloadable or streaming career programs. Registration for job fairs, event RSVPs, and employer resume collection should be electronic.

While a welcoming career office with evening advising is an important feature for a part-time program, many career offices find few part-time students take advantage of these face-to-face opportunities. Therefore, lines of communication should be established to encourage night students to call on their career office *when they are ready* using the method of communication most convenient to them, whether in-person, email, telephone, or even instant messaging. Counseling staff may need to reach out to evening students differently than they their day counterparts. Notices in newsletters and broadcast emails are rarely a top priority for busy evening students. Therefore, at the University of Houston we have begun personally calling each evening

¹ Telephone interview with Judith Collins, Director of Research, Nat'l Ass'n for Law Placement (NALP) Washington D.C. (Sept. 26, 2007) (discussing unpublished analysis of employment statistics of class of 2006).

² Nat'l Ass'n for Law Placement, Inc. (NALP), *Jobs & JD's: Employment and Salaries of New Law Graduates, Class of 2006*, at 101 (2007).

³ In addition to my own career experience with University of Houston Law Center, suggestions for this article have come from members of NALP's Evening Division Working Group. Specifically, Teresa Grey, Counselor, Career Development Office, Widener University Law School, Shawn Beem, Assistant Director of Career Services, Capitol University Law School and Margaret Reuter, Assistant Dean for Career Services, New York Law School took the time to share ideas for supporting evening students.

student once a semester, to touch base and see how we can be of service in his or her job search.

Partnering and Pockets of Time

Many career offices have learned that part-time student participation in career events can be increased by collaborating with the Evening Law Student Association (ELSA) and bringing in night program alumni as featured guest speakers. Career colleague Meg Reuter from New York Law School surveys her students to find, among other information, pockets of time. She now plans important evening programs in the two weeks before the spring semester begins. She also has four evening student representatives (one from each class year) on her student advisory committee to keep abreast of part-time student concerns.

Tap Volunteer and Evening Externship Opportunities

Legal experience significantly enhances a law student's resume. If an evening clinic is not an option, help students find a weekend or "after hours" legal environment willing to provide supervision. Many legal aid offices offer weekend clinics where evening students can serve and gain exposure to the profession. Some cities have night court opportunities or non-profit attorneys willing to provide a research-oriented externship that can accommodate an evening student's schedule. Alternatively, with prior planning and a supportive employer, some part-time students can bank leave and use one or two days a week to participate in an externship or clinic.

Maximize Networking

NALP employment statistics show that twenty-one percent of graduates secured their employment through a self-initiated search.⁴ While career offices train students to find targets for informational interviews and networking, Martindale Hubble will rarely indicate whether an attorney graduated from a part-time program. Career offices, alumni offices, and/or ELSA should strive to create and maintain a database of evening alumni, keeping note of those interested in visiting with current students. Further, night students should be encouraged to tap their current and pre-law school network. Given their work and life experience, evening students often have a more extensive and significant network than their day counterparts. They need to be reminded that they must let people know they are in law school and want to spend time talking with lawyers. Evening students should include legal recruiters in their contact list. While headhunters are usually a dead end for inexperienced full-time students, several of our part-time graduates have found jobs with the assistance of recruiters.

Evening students are diverse, have an employment track record, and possess a work ethic is self evident in withstanding the rigors of night school while maintaining a day job. These qualities make them attractive candidates for legal employment. Armed with facts about the legal market, available advising resources, networking contacts, and having developed a search strategy, night students become successful attorneys. Adjusting career operations to serve this important student population may boost employment statistics and, more importantly, will help make happy alums.

⁴ Jobs & JD's at 49.

Section on Part-Time Division Programs

Officers:

Chair, A. Darby Dickerson, Stetson University College of Law; Chair-elect, Frederick White, Golden Gate University School of Law; Secretary, John A. Lynch, Jr., University of Baltimore School of Law

Executive Committee:

Christina L. Bennett, Seton Hall University School of Law; Angela Gilmore, Nova Southeastern University; Brenda Saunders Hampden, Seton Hall University School of Law; Michelle K. Harker, Hamline University School of Law; Arthur Leavens, Western New England College School of Law; Anthonia Steele, Capital University Law School, as well as officers listed above.