

## **Report of the Wisconsin Law Alumni Association Board of Visitors**

On October 24-25, 1982, the Board of Visitors of the Wisconsin Law Alumni Association conducted its annual inspection of the Law School. The Board's responsibilities include review of the School's "... facilities, curriculum, placement, admissions and public relations..." As always we visited classes and met with students, staff and faculty to gather information concerning the operation of the School. We recommend that next year's visit reinstate the open forum session to insure that everyone with something to say has the opportunity to say it.

**General Comments:** Once again, overall we are impressed with the quality of the education being offered. Despite an ever-tightening budget, morale is good. Budget cuts have resulted in some reduction in course offerings because money is not available to hire lecturers. The faculty who are teaching continue to impress us. While we viewed only a portion of all courses being offered we feel that the quality of instruction overall is well above average. Based on our limited opportunity to observe, we wish to particularly commend Professors Clauss, Davis and Irish. Issues raised by students during our visit do merit our consideration, but they do not include the critical concerns that have troubled past visitors. We would also like to commend the administration for the improvements it has already made in advanced course scheduling. Since our suggestions on this subject last year, a system of scheduling a semester in advance has been instituted. We understand that an advanced registration plan is also being developed. These two developments should resolve complaints lodged during earlier visits.

### **Minority Students**

Law School's recruitment of minority students and the problems faced by those students while in school provoked perhaps the most discussion. Students were critical of insufficient minority recruitment. It was their feeling that the best qualified minority students were not being recruited by our Law School, and that many of the problems minority law students faced could be traced to this failure. We learned, however, that a new Assistant Dean has joined the staff this fall. This Dean has minority recruitment as one of his principal duties, and has already begun to improve our system.

Students also voiced concern that lower grades for minority students may, in some part, reflect perhaps unconscious discrimination. It was suggested that even in a "blind" grading system the writing styles of minority students may be recognizable and different enough from the norm to result in unequal consideration.

Obviously these are serious concerns and must be seriously treated. We feel, however, that after our brief exposure we are insufficiently informed to render either an opinion or suggestions for correction of faults that may exist. We therefore ask that all parties report back to us next year. We want to know what problems do exist, if any, what actions the School has already taken and their results; and suggestions for other improvements the School can make.

### **Class Attendance**

Our observations cause concern in the area of class attendance. We suspect that not only is there great variation from class to class, depending on the subject matter, size and teacher; but also from day to day, and year to year and that some absence is unavoidable and probably should not be of great concern. But our discussion with some professors causes us to wonder if a regular pattern of absence is not a matter of concern deserving remedy. Consistently poor attendance creates at least an impression of superficial education and lack of professional dedication. While we recognize that law students are adults and are responsible for their own actions we believe that graduates of this Law School must possess legal qualifications beyond minimal competency.

We are unsure of what sanctions to suggest for students with poor attendance records. Our individual opinions range from prohibiting graduation to some drop in class grades to some symbolic wrist slap. We would like to hear the faculty's opinions on this matter.

In a related area, we have observed that student participation in class discussion seems to be enhanced when the professor can call on individuals by name. We understand that some professors use seating charts, and we encourage the rest of the faculty to consider doing so, at least in the larger classrooms.

### **Placement**

In contrast to past years when complaints about the sign up procedure were common, the total absence of such complaints this year suggests that the "bid" system adopted two years ago is a great success.

The discussion we did hear concerning placement was a concern that there is insufficient emphasis on recruitment by employers other than large firms. We have learned that the placement office did offer a

nine-hour career planning seminar this semester, and that the focus of this offering was consideration of alternatives and methods of reaching those choices. We hope that those students unsure of their goals or definitely interested in careers outside large firms will take advantage of this seminar.

Some of us raised a question concerning on-campus interviews. Why, we wonder, can't employers restrict interviews to those persons most likely to be hired? We were told that the Law School will not, for instance, restrict interviews to students in the top 10%. We would be interested in learning whether others share our concerns in this area.

#### **Legal Writing**

This seems to be an area of perennial concern. We are pleased to note that progress seems to have been made but urge even greater efforts. We understand that a writing sample will now be provided with each admission packet. These will be reviewed, and may be used to recommend remedial writing exercises. Problems which still exist include legal writing case problems that surpass the substantive knowledge of second year instructors, and problems which are out of synchronization with students in the part-time program. We trust that the School will seek to correct these problems.

#### **Judicial Clinical Placements**

Several students told us that judicial clinical placements were hard to obtain. They felt that the experience gained in these programs was substantial, and that more openings should be created. On the other hand, the School notes that all clinical programs are very cost intensive and require the commitment of large amounts of supervisory time. In light of our current budget, a solution here may be unobtainable, but we hope that this area will be considered in the future if funding becomes more available.

#### **Dean Search**

We voiced our concern that alumni seemed to have no role in the upcoming Dean search. However, the chair of the search committee has already secured approval of the Chancellor for consultation with alumni leaders.

We also offer some advice on advisable criteria for selection of a new Dean. In our view, the Dean of a major law school must be a master of public relations and image building. We think this carries over into many aspects of the Law School, including recruitment of students and faculty, placement and fund raising. We would hope that the new Dean will be selected with this in mind.

#### **Environmental Law Courses**

We learned during our visit that there presently are fewer course offerings in the environmental area than in the past. Particularly, we note that no courses are offered in air pollution or solid waste management. We believe that such courses should be added if there is sufficient student interest. Membership in the Environmental Law Society, totaling forty students, seems to indicate that there would be sufficient demand. Faculty members should be encouraged to develop offerings in these fields.

#### **The Costs of Education**

We are generally and genuinely concerned over the rising costs of legal education. While it obviously presses current students, we are more worried about how this problem may influence future classes. This school has consistently endeavored to avoid "elitist" classes, but this commitment may be undermined if only the rich will be able to afford legal education. We recognize that the costs at other schools, particularly private schools, may be far greater than here. This does not, however, alter our concern. Instead, we worry that legal education generally may be restricted to the rich.

#### **Other Suggestions**

We observe that law office economics and management are becoming more and more important. We wonder whether it may eventually be desirable to create a course in this area.

We are encouraged that progress has been made toward a joint JD/MBA offering. This should be a beneficial and attractive offering.

We learned the status of building addition plans and encourage their fulfillment. We see the need for more office space, particularly since this will free up library space, and more courtroom teaching facilities. While no concrete will be poured tomorrow, we hope the Law School will move ahead on the state and campus priority lists so that construction will take place in the reasonably near future.

#### **Conclusion**

We have a good school, one in which we can take justifiable pride. That does not mean that there is no room for improvement. We hope that our comments and suggestions are taken in this manner: to improve a very good program.

We also take modest pride in the fact that all members of the Board of Visitors participated in the inspection. We were also joined by members of WLAA's board of directors and other alumni equally motivated by the continued excellence of this school.

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