

Australian legal education than the institution of an American style bar exam, which would also have an adverse affect on equity and access to the profession and on mutual recognition issues.

The "Offices" project at Griffith University Law School and the use of video as a tool for evaluation

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The central aim of the Offices project at Griffith University Law School in Australia is to begin the transition from the undergraduate student to the graduate professional. Hence, evaluation methods must assess the entire learning context by taking into account numerous objectives and varying needs beyond those of the immediate situation.

Griffith introduced teacher-less co-operative learning groups called Offices into its first year curriculum. Students meet weekly without the presence of a teacher. Offices provide an opportunity for students to work collectively on tasks set by a teacher, but without the direct control of the teacher. Offices were introduced to develop skills and attitudes associated with successful law practice. Despite the attraction of incorporating teacherless adult learning methods in law classes, little research has been done to assess their effectiveness.

While questionnaires had been used in the past to assess student attitudes towards the project, such research only generates quantitative information which does not convey the 'flavour' of the situation under investigation.

More broad ranging evaluations have been possible through the use of convergent interviews and video cameras. However, few educators and legal practitioners appear to use videos to evaluate the general effectiveness of particular aspects of their work on a regular basis.

Further, to assess student performance, 12 videos of the Offices were made with the purpose of determining how different Offices operated. Students were asked whether they would mind being filmed, and three days notice before filming was given. To minimise the bias created by the fact that the students know they are being filmed, several steps were taken, including videoing the same Office twice and assuring students that the videos were for research purposes only and would not be used for assessment.

From the video data, the authors tried to get an overall picture of how each different Office functioned and how the individuals within an office conducted themselves. Ratings were allocated for certain characteristics and for the way in which Offices handled conflict and dominance.

The results showed that a considerable amount of Office time was spent socialising and discussing personal matters. Most Offices created a supportive, relaxed and friendly environment for learning in which most students felt confident enough to speak out. Unfortunately, the results indicated that little co-operative learning occurred. However, most Offices were extremely task efficient, preferring

to adopt a divide and conquer approach to tasks rather than a co-operative approach. This was especially the case in the second year groups where the Offices were used as a place to socialise and discuss other studies.

The videos have also revealed that the broad aims of the Offices Project are being achieved because students are developing important skills which will assist them in their transition from undergraduate to professional. Teachers have also developed an insight into the effective management of small group learning environments.

The history, organisation, and accomplishments of the American Bar Association accreditation process

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Changes to the accreditation process would have a significant impact on law schools. When considering accreditation, law schools are not the most powerful or influential constituent within the accreditation process.

The ABA accreditation program was founded in 1893 with the formation of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. The present standards were adopted by the ABA House of Delegates in February 1973, and there has not been any major overhaul since. Two major efforts are underway at present that will have an impact on the existing Standards: the Commission to Review the Substance and Process of the American Bar Association's Accreditation of American Law Schools - The Wahl Commission;

and the Standards Review Committee.

The constituents in the accreditation process are the highest appellate courts in the States in which graduates seek admission, the Department of Education, the 177 law schools, the ABA and the law school applicants and students. Graduates from an ABA accredited law school fully satisfy the educational requirements for sitting the bar exam. If non-accredited law school graduates were allowed to sit the bar exams, the importance of the ABA's accreditation would be severely undermined. For a graduate to receive a government guaranteed student loan from the Department of Education the student must be enrolled in an ABA accredited law school. The ABA's accreditation program relies on the willingness of the law school community to accept and participate in the accreditation process. Law schools provide the volunteers who drive the accreditation program. A single nationwide accreditation system means that law schools do not have to respond to accreditation enquiries from more than one jurisdiction. The ABA also serves as a shield from government regulation of legal education and provides considerable funding for the accreditation process.

It is now beyond doubt that one of the ABA's objectives is consumer protection, where the consumers are the students and the clients of the graduates. The standards set by the ABA address organisational and administrative aspects, educational programs, faculty, admissions, library and physical plant. Not one new standard has

been adopted since their inception, whilst there have been some modification to existing standards. The author explains the process by which new standards are considered. One such body that may offer new standards is the Accreditation Committee, which is composed of two judges from the State's highest appellate court, a federal trial judge, two public members, a law librarian, a clinician and six law deans.

Site evaluations of law schools are conducted and are extremely important, as a negative accreditation finding can be challenged if there was no factual basis in the site inspection. The site teams are generally composed of legal educators and at least one librarian.

The achievements of the ABA through its accreditation program include the reduction of class sizes, positive discrimination programs, support for tenure and the general improvement of legal education. The accreditation program has stopped universities treating law schools like cash cows to be milked by the university overhead device.

Reflections on the law school accreditation process

R W Bennett

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The most basic and obvious justification for an accreditation system is to set minimum standards of instructional competence, presumably in the interests of consumer protection.

The author focuses on the problems in the accreditation process which arise because the

process does not confine itself to consumer protection through assurance of minimum standards of instructional competence. The energy and resources are directed elsewhere. The major inquiry is whether it has the ability to fulfil its aspirations and whether the school is in fact doing so. Ironically, no question as to the school's satisfaction of the minimum requirements of instructional competence is raised in the accreditation process. Some of the accreditation criteria do not enquire as to whether the school meets a standard, but whether it has set a standard for itself and whether it is being met. Even more obscure are the accreditation criteria that the inspection team not only examines the grade point averages and LSAT scores of the student body, but their states of residency, college majors and feeder colleges.

The balance of the accreditation program does appear to favour the realisation of the aspirations of the school rather than assuring the minimum instructional competence of the school. No sanctions attach to the failure of a school to realise its aspirations unless that failure involves a violation of standards. As previously noted, there are no minimum standards, just aspirations. Consequently, the ABA, as watchdog, cannot effectively pursue the aspirations aspect as a serious form of consumer protection.

The centrepiece of each school's preparation for accreditation evaluation is self-criticism. The inspection team uses the school's self-analysis to alert itself to avenues of inquiry. Naturally, the self-study addresses the school's