

The problem with the skills content of so-called 'liberal education' is not with the conception but with the delivery. The claim that a law degree develops general transferable skills is often based on an assumption about what is implicit in being a graduate, rather than being made explicit as part of the definition of a program or communicated to students as an explicit expectation. Second, even though this implicit assumption is now being reinforced sometimes by explicit policies, the general policies seem currently limited in their elaboration and implementation. There is little evidence of formal support for students to improve their skills, even if assessment does focus in part on them. Third, the claim to develop general transferable skills is not matched by evidence that law schools seek to be in touch with the wider range of employers either directly or indirectly through careers services. They are thus not focused on how skills developed in the context of law can be applicable in other contexts and what activities would best promote such relevant skills.

The kind of assessment of skills which is appropriate depends very much on one's objectives in including skills as part of the curriculum. There are at least three different objectives possible, only the first of which requires external verification of outcome. First, we may wish that students should attain a certain level of achievement in a number of specific skills. Second, we may wish students to be exposed to a range of experiences which may enable them to enhance their skills. Third, if skills are a language of talking about achievement, then we might want students to be able to internalise that language in discussing their learning. There can thus be a significant difference between requiring that students undergo a specific process and requiring that they attain a specified level of competence in a particular skill.

Key skills (or more broadly general transferable skills) are integral to higher education in its traditional 'liberal education' objective. But in emphasising this objective, we should not ignore employ-

ability. The idea of skills as a language is central to what students should be able to do to talk about their achievements in higher education holistically. Each subject, like law, will have its own circumstances and agendas. There may be a need to differentiate some specific vocational aspects from general transferable skills. But it is important to maintain the link to show that those who are successful in the specific professions immediately served by a degree program need general transferable skills as much as those who go into other walks of life. Institutions tend to assume that skills develop automatically, rather than as the fruit of explicit cultivation in the curriculum.

## TEACHERS

### Thanks, but I'm just looking: or, why I don't want to be a dean

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49 *J Legal Educ* 4, 1999, pp 595-600

The author recently spent three years serving as associate dean at the law school where he had taught since 1990. His portfolio included helping to coordinate the scheduling of more than 100 classes each semester, managing and supporting some 80 adjuncts, overseeing clinical and externship programs, championing the interests of the one-third of the students who were enrolled in the part-time program, supervising the pro bono/public interest program, serving as a liaison between the administration and a plethora of student organisations and faculty committees, and creating the school's bi-monthly newsletter and supervising its production.

Why would any member of a law faculty trade a comfortable life of teaching, scholarship, and minimal administrative responsibility for a life of administrative drudgery, very little teaching, and virtually no time for scholarship?

A significant amount of culture shock accompanied the author's move from faculty to administration. Perhaps the one that caught him most off guard was the

change in people's reactions to him. Becoming an associate dean was a harsh re-entry into the real world. The parallels between associate deaning and practising law in a big firm were astonishing. The contrasts between being an associate dean and being a regular faculty member were equally profound. Just as in practice, it was necessary to keep track of vacation and sick days and deal with the political realities of never being able to please everyone who came advocating a cause or seeking a remedy for a real or imagined injury.

### A primer for the first-time law dean candidate

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49 *J Legal Educ* 4, 1999, pp 564-594

Each dean search, of course, has its own unique attributes, and no universal formula charts the path for the first-time candidate. One's performance as dean is in no small measure a product of instinct and judgment, and the same is true for the dean candidate. Also, like a dean, the dean candidate will encounter the unexpected and be evaluated on her handling of the unforeseen question or circumstance. Nevertheless, some things that happen in dean searches can be anticipated, and the candidate can take steps to prepare for the foreseeable ways in which she will be evaluated.

What follows are fourteen principles of which the first-time dean candidate should be mindful. First, it is necessary to know – and be able to explain – why you want to be the dean. It is worth reflecting upon the reasons because one of the first questions put to every candidate is 'Why do you want to be dean?' Not having a good answer to this question—worse yet, appearing not to have thought much about it—is one of the quickest ways to bring a candidacy to an end.

Ultimately the reasons for seeking a deanship are personal, and many good ones are possible. Knowing which reasons apply requires knowing some things