



WESTERN NEW ENGLAND
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL *of* LAW

**2019 – 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN
WITH
ALIGNMENT TO UNIVERSITY
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

Introduction

This document was produced in response to a request from the Office of the Provost for the School of Law to provide documentation of its current strategic plan with illustration of how the plan is in alignment with the university's strategic priorities in effect as of the date of this document. The document is separated into two parts. Part I is the excerpt from *Beginning a New Century: A Strategic Plan for Western New England University School of Law, adopted April 5, 2019*. This document was created by the Dean with consultation and advice from the planning and budget committee. This document was submitted to the faculty for review and approval via consent.

Respectfully submitted,
Zelda B. Harris
Dean, School of Law
December 1, 2023

PART I.

The 2019 Strategic Plan

In light of the insights revealed by the environmental analysis and our experience, the following short term and longer-term goals emerge.

- A. ***Increase our applicant pool and maximize our success converting*** our applicants into matriculants.
1. ***Create a structured marketing plan that is regularly reviewed and updated.*** This plan can originate with the Admissions Office, but should be available for comment and input by all stakeholders.
 2. ***Keep tuition relatively low compared to our private competitors.*** Affordability has been, and will continue to be, one of our key competitive advantages. Currently, only one private college competitor in our region, Roger Williams, has an estimated cost of attendance at \$54,315 which is lower than our estimated cost of attendance of \$63,984.¹
 3. ***Continue our policy of maintaining a competitive discount rate for tuition in order to bring in a sizable class and compete with peer institutions.*** The net tuition revenue should yield increasing revenue while at the same time reserving adequate room to offer scholarship discounts attractive to students. The current discount rate is 51%.
 4. ***Increase outreach to undergraduates at WNE and other institutions.*** Do so through programming focusing on WNE undergraduates, as well as the Speakers Bureau, which brings faculty speakers to undergraduate institutions in the region. We should leverage our existing relationships with our 3+3 partner institutions to gain access to interested pre-law students at those schools. We should continue and expand our efforts to engage positively with pre-law advisors and other key influencers at current and potential feeder schools.
 5. ***Execute the overall scholarship strategy to maximize the credentials profile of our class in order to attract higher credentialed students and to ensure that students with the lowest entering credentials will succeed in the program and pass the bar.*** We must continue to avoid ABA tripwires on the lower end of the credentials spectrum.
 6. ***Allow the Admissions Office the flexibility with scholarships necessary to be responsive to the market.*** The budget fixes the overall scholarship expense figure, but the Admissions Office needs room to maneuver as the market unfolds

¹ See <https://law.rwu.edu/sites/law/files/downloads/financial-aid/docs/Law%202018-19%20Cost%20of%20Attendance.pdf> versus <https://www1.wne.edu/law/cost-and-aid/juris-doctor.cfm>

over the course of an admissions cycle. We propose establishing a firm overall scholarship discount rate, the attainment of which the Admissions Office would be responsible, but to give the Admissions Office appropriate latitude during the admissions cycle to allocate the scholarship funds as the market dictates, including at the upper end of the credential scale to attract more Holmes Scholars.

7. ***Increase the diversity of the applicant pool, incoming class, and student body generally in terms of race and ethnicity as part of the larger effort to matriculate more students from the greater Springfield community.***
 8. ***Continue to develop a new marketing and communications plan to be integrated with Slate, our new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform.*** The new CRM will allow us to automate partially our Comm. Plan, providing a thoughtful stream of email and direct mail pieces to prospects in every phase of the admissions funnel.
- B. Take active steps to ***improve outcomes in placement and bar passage.***
1. ***Use the collaboration with BARBRI to supplement the efforts of the faculty, Director of Academic Success, and Director of Bar Admissions Programs.*** With financial resources from the academic and bar success materials fee and technical assistance from BARBRI, the Director of Bar Admissions Programs will be able to evaluate, monitor and coach students more effectively. We ought to measure and monitor the impact of these programs to make sure the students receive fair value for the fees charged.
 2. ***Integrate academic support and bar success across the program.*** Doctrinal faculty must be encouraged to find ways to work with the faculty in the academic support and bar passage areas to integrate academic success/bar exam strategies into substantive courses in each year of study.
 3. Continue the already-successful effort, begun in the 2014-15 admissions cycle, to ***increase the academic credentials*** of the entering class while maintaining, or hopefully appropriately increasing, class size and revenue. We should assess what our optimum class size over the next ten years will be based upon required revenue, faculty strength, institutional support, market forces, and other identified factors.
 4. Continue to enhance our program to better ***prepare our students to be as “practice ready”*** as possible, so employers will better understand the value of a Western New England education.
- C. Continue to ***manage the expense side of the ledger*** diligently.

1. ***Faculty size must correspond to the ability to maintain a strong program of legal education.*** Our faculty shrunk significantly in the last seven years, and cannot shrink further without potentially jeopardizing our ability to maintain a strong program of legal education. For the foreseeable future, we will need to continue to maintain a much smaller faculty than we have had historically, with an eye toward replacing those colleagues who are currently on the phased retirement program or who may retire in the near future with new hires who will teach full loads, engage in the School and its service, and produce excellent scholarship. We will look to increase the overall number of faculty members only when enrollments increase significantly.
2. ***Reintroduce a limited number of faculty summer research stipends and modestly increase support for faculty professional development.*** Many faculty members have continued to produce scholarship despite having significantly heavier teaching and service loads. Reintroducing a limited number of research stipends and increasing support for conference travel, etc., will be necessary to help junior faculty members establish themselves in their fields and to reward senior scholars who have maintained productivity despite significant burdens.
3. ***Continue thoughtful management of staff*** and administrative functions. The numerous staff departures in 2018 enabled the administration to rethink various staff positions. Our recent hiring of five staff members fills essential roles, but in a thoughtful way which will yield over \$25,000 per year in salary savings and over \$20,000 per year in student worker wages compared to the previous structure.
4. ***Continue to manage the budget of the law library carefully, cutting unnecessary expenses whenever possible.*** The Library will continue to evaluate all resources, especially those available in dual format, and will continue collaborating with the University library for shared resources when practicable.

Elements of the long-term plan:

- A. ***Develop a program that leverages our strengths and differentiates us from our competitors*** while responding to the realities of the evolving legal education marketplace, with the hallmark being the acquisition of professional skills and knowledge necessary to be ready to enter the profession.
 1. ***Center for Social Justice:*** build a meaningful center around civil rights, economic justice and social justice issues, building on our existing faculty strength in these areas. Incorporate the work of the Center for Gender and Sexuality Studies as one important focal point in the new center. The Center will be multi-faceted and have meaningful pay-offs for both faculty and students, such as curricular content, invited speakers, symposia, and an externship component. Fundraising for this center will be a campaign item in the University's Second Century Fundraising campaign.

2. ***Center for Community Practice***: similarly, if we are able to find faculty champions for this idea and are able to resource it appropriately, we could build a center focused on all facets of small firm practice, including the business of law and strategies for adapting small firms and solo practices to changing conditions. This, too, would be a good item for the upcoming campaign.
3. ***Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship***: this center, developed at the School over a decade ago and initiated with external funding, can flourish if new external resources are secured. A reinvigorated center could support stronger collaborations at the University, across numerous colleges and universities in the region, and in the local business and entrepreneurship community.
4. ***Center for Aging and Elder Affairs***: this center is a possible collaborative effort between the School and the University's other Colleges (namely, Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Business, and Engineering) to leverage the depth of our faculty interest in these areas. If external funding is secured to develop this center, it could serve some of the unmet needs of the aging population in western Massachusetts.
5. ***Develop a doctrinal "smart curriculum"*** – in light of our smaller faculty size and ongoing pressure to contain costs by keeping adjunct hiring as low as possible, we need to reconcile the traditional goal of the School to provide a "full-service curriculum" with the reality that we cannot be all things to all people.
6. ***Ensure our students are prepared to pass a state bar examination*** within both current ABA compliance requirements and any future revisions. While ensuring we do not simply focus on bar passage, we must also recognize that our students, who generally will not receive high-income opportunities immediately out of law school, should be ready to pass the bar as soon as possible so that they can begin their careers.
7. ***Develop cross-cutting certificate programs*** within "smart-curriculum emphasis areas," or programmatic niches (e.g. trial advocacy, civil rights advocacy, criminal advocacy, community advocacy, transactional and entrepreneurship practice, regulatory and compliance practice, transnational practice, small business representation).
8. Respond to market pressures and find new markets by ***increasing online/distance-learning offerings*** (including streamlined & optimized technology and stand-by, real-time technology support).

B. ***Develop new revenue streams.***

1. ***Build enrollment of the LLM*** while ensuring the quality of student experience in those programs:

- a. Increase the number of credits that JD students can use toward the LLM degree from six to eight credits, to encourage more JD students to pursue the LLM degree.
- b. Actively market MS degree to insurance professionals, nursing home administrators, and others with interest in estate planning and elder law.
- c. Consider other possibilities for LLM offerings, including joint degrees or revenue-sharing agreements with other universities.

2. ***Increase collaborations with the other Colleges within the University*** by adding certificates or additional joint degrees targeted at working professionals with an interest in law who do not need a JD.
3. ***Explore the possibilities for offering innovative scheduling options***, including increasing the possibilities for distance education in the JD program.
4. ***Consider offering certificates*** in compliance, paralegal studies, diversity and inclusion, or other such options.

C. *Increase fundraising efforts.*

1. ***Work with Advancement on cultivating major gifts*** that offset salary and operating expenses. Consider potential naming opportunities at the School of Law, including for rooms and centers, as well as for research fellowships and professorships.
2. ***Work with Advancement on cultivating smaller gifts*** that provide “sponsorships” for School of Law programs, thereby offsetting some operating expenses.
3. ***Use the University and School’s centennial as an opportunity*** to think creatively about expanding the donor pool beyond its historical boundaries.

D. *Build partnerships* across campus and in the community.

1. ***Find ways to collaborate with other Colleges within the University.*** Discussions surrounding the potential Center for Social Justice and a potential Center on Aging and Elder Affairs provide exciting opportunities in this regard.

2. ***Work with our partners at other institutions*** to enhance our existing 3+3 programs. This may require examining the incentives on the partner's side and making adjustments for revenue sharing in order to incentivize our 3+3 partners to promote the programs.
- E. ***Re-invest in faculty development*** to maximize the School's ability to attract and retain high quality teacher-scholars and ensure an excellent program for our students and increased recognition for the School and the University.
1. ***Begin an open and candid dialogue about the status issues*** that exist between the tenure-track faculty and the contract faculty and pursue in good faith efforts to address the legitimate grievances.
 2. ***With an eye toward diversifying the racial and ethnic diversity of the faculty, replenish the faculty*** by hiring promising candidates new to law teaching or lateral candidates who can enrich our program and our reputation.
 3. ***Budget appropriately for faculty development resources***, especially research grant funds, sabbatical leaves, travel reimbursement, and conference attendance. Ensure that the Library is well-positioned to provide support for the scholarly and teaching efforts of the faculty.
 4. ***Address issues of faculty workload*** to ensure that every member of the faculty is contributing a "fair share" to the School through an appropriate combination of teaching, scholarship and service. In making this assessment, the relevant metrics ought to be the contributions of law faculty at similarly-situated law schools.
 5. ***Take steps to maintain and enhance the existing collegiality*** among the faculty and develop it into a more robust *esprit de corps* by instituting programs and events designed to recognize faculty or to provide ways for faculty to connect and bond.

Conclusion

The proposals in this Plan represent the faculty's best judgment concerning how to position the School of Law in light of the realities of the current legal education market. We have weathered a difficult stretch and have taken appropriate austerity measures to run the School responsibly, and this Plan provides a blueprint to building on the School's strengths to ensure a strong future. We look forward to our second century, building on a long history of service to the western Massachusetts community and beyond.

PART II. School of Law Strategic Plan Alignment with University's Strategic Priorities/Themes

Theme One: Provide a Student-centered Experience

- Continue to be a student-centered law school.
- Continue to manage the expense side of the ledger diligently to keep the cost of law school manageable for the students.
- Develop a program that leverages our strengths and differentiates us from our competitors.
- Support the continued development of the five concentrations in the JD curriculum.
- Establish the office of the Director of Externships to increase capacity for students to obtain placements in legal offices in the community thereby enhancing the ability for the students to be practice-ready upon graduation.

Theme Two: Become a Laboratory for Academic Innovation

- Explore further development of a hybrid, low-residency online learning mode of delivery for the JD curriculum.
- Continued development of experiential learning opportunities (i.e. Family Defense Practicum; Innocence Clinic) for students to enhance their ability to be practice-ready upon graduation.
- Build partnerships across campus and in the community.

Theme Three: Promote Innovation and Transformation

- Develop a program that leverages our strengths and differentiates us from our competitors.
- Support the continued development of the Center for Social Justice with particular emphasis on the Access to Justice technology kiosks.
- Support the continued development of the LLM and MS programs.

Theme Four: Create Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Develop and enhance the JD curriculum in doctrinal and experiential regarding diversity, inclusion, equity, and bias, cross-cultural competency, and racism.
- Continued support for events and programming around diversity, equity, and inclusion through the Outreach and Diversity Committee, Center for Social Justice, Clason Speaker Series, Color of Law Roundtable Discussion Series.
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- Increase our diverse and Western New England community-based applicant pool and maximize our success converting our applicants into matriculants.

Theme Five: Enhance Culture and Excellence

- Take active steps to improve outcomes in placement and bar passage.

- Implement a scholarship strategy to maximize the credentials profile of our class to attract higher credentialed students to ensure that students with the lowest entering credentials will succeed in the program and pass the bar.
- Increase our applicant pool and maximize our success converting our applicants into matriculants.
- Development of a unitary tenure-track status for all new faculty hires.
- Reinvest in faculty development to maximize the school's ability to attract and retain high quality teacher-scholars and ensure an excellent program for our students and increased recognition for the School and University.
- Encourage faculty service in student activities and events.
- Development of new revenue streams and increase fundraising efforts.