

**University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Assessment Progress Report Form / Spring 2003**

William H. Bowen School of Law

Degree Program: J.D.
Department and College: Law, William H. Bowen School of Law
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Assessment Committee

Use of Assessment for Program Building and Improvement:

The most important goal for any assessment project is to provide information to build and improve programs. This section should, therefore, be weighted the most heavily of all in your overall score evaluation.

Please discuss how you have used assessment findings this past year to understand, improve, and/or make decisions regarding the program. What have been your main findings? How did you analyze them? How do you interpret them? Have these findings led to making any significant changes in your program? If so, what are they? Please focus on evidence for or proposed changes that will lead to improvements in student learning outcomes.

(1) Socratic Dialogue Method of Instruction as Assessment - The most prevalent and effective assessment device used by faculty at the School of Law is the traditional “Socratic” method of instruction employed at least to a degree in nearly all law school classes. This in-class question and answer dialogue with students allows the faculty member to assess the extent to which students have read material assigned for class, the level of the students’ understanding of underlying theoretical and policy themes, and the degree of maturation of student critical thinking skills. Using the Socratic method, faculty can make instant adjustments in teaching technique and course coverage in reaction to the level of student learning and understanding revealed during the dialogue.

(2) Analysis of Arkansas Bar Examination Results for Assessment - The Arkansas Bar Examination administered by the Arkansas State Board of Law Examiners under the auspices of the Arkansas Supreme Court continues to provide an excellent vehicle for assessing law student achievement and, in turn, for gauging the success of the educational mission of the School of Law, both overall and in individual course areas. An ad hoc committee of faculty and administrators continues to analyze bar exam results with a view toward recommending and implementing curricular change.

(3) Assessment Survey of Multistate Bar Exam Topics Taught - The School of Law Assessment Committee is surveying faculty teaching courses in subject areas covered on the Multistate Bar Exam (MBE) to compare the topics covered in each subject area of the Exam with the material actually taught in the courses covering those subject areas. The comparison will allow individual faculty members to consider (“assess”) whether to expand coverage of MBE topics not currently covered in the faculty member’s course. In addition, data from the comparison will be collected as part of the School of Law’s general assessment effort for use in evaluating the relationship between bar exam results and topics covered in bar exam courses. Results to date confirm the Committee’s expectation that most MBE topics are covered by faculty teaching MBE courses. However, several of the faculty surveyed have indicated that they will now include coverage of MBE topics that have not been covered in the past. An exemplar of the survey instrument to be completed by faculty teaching the MBE course subject area of property is attached to this report.

(4) Curricular Changes in Response to Analysis of Bar Exam Performance as an Assessment Device - In response to the School of Law’s Assessment Plan’s directive that the School’s curriculum be reviewed in light of the mission statement and identified objectives of legal education, the two-semester Constitutional Law and Torts courses have been reduced from six to four hours each and are now both one-semester courses. The reduction in course hours for the required Constitutional Law and Torts courses and semesterizing those courses is, in part, a result of analysis of student performance on the Arkansas Bar Examination, using the bar exam as assessment device. Reduction in the course hours and semesterization of those courses will enable students to take additional elective courses in bar exam subject areas.

(5) Legal Writing Assessment-Diagnostic Test - The legal writing faculty administers a writing assessment-diagnostic test for entering first-year students followed by an end-of-year post-test to measure the levels of improvement during the first year. Several of the faculty analyze the data from the tests to determine whether changes should be made in their first-year legal writing courses with regard to implementation of basic writing skills. Test results are also used to tailor the legal writing educational program of individual students, including referral of students with poor, basic writing skills to the UALR Writing Center on main campus.

(6) Law Library Assessment Survey - The Law Library of the School of Law conducted a user survey aimed at assessing the degree of satisfaction with present services, the need to make changes in present services, and the need to provide additional services. A copy of that survey and the survey results are attached to this report. Although for the most part the survey confirmed that Law Library patrons are very

satisfied with the level and quality of services provided, several changes in the Library's delivery of services have been made or will be made as a result of the assessment survey. Among the changes that have been or will be made in response to the assessment survey are: expansion of Saturday closing hours beyond the present 5 p.m. close; replacement of two or three worn out and out-of-date copy machines; replacement of a number of out-of-date computers in the student computer lab; and allowing students to carry their computer user profiles from computer to computer.

Faculty and Stake Holder Involvement:

Please describe how faculty, students, and other stakeholders have been involved in the assessment process and the decisions arising out of assessment findings. How have you shared the results and your interpretation with your stakeholders?

As indicated in the above stated description of assessment processes, faculty and students are involved in one way or another in all assessment activities at the School of Law. In addition, during the fall semester, 2002, the School of Law conducted comprehensive surveys of students and employers of our graduates. The data from those surveys will be analyzed during the 2003-04 academic year for indications of changes that should be made in any aspects of the School of Law's program, including individual courses. Copies of both the student and employer surveys and the survey results are attached to this report. Law Library patrons, law students, attorneys and judges, were subjects of the Law Library Assessment Survey.

Approach:

Help place your efforts for the time period reported here in context for your reader by briefly summarizing the goals and student learning objectives of your program. Were there any significant changes since last year's report?

The goal of the School of Law is to provide a challenging legal education that equips its graduates with the skills, analytical ability, and a sense of ethical and professional responsibility that will be essential to counsel and to represent the public successfully, competently, and professionally throughout their career in law. The School's goal for graduates who will not use their degrees as practicing attorneys is that their effectiveness will be enhanced in other occupations in both national and international environments. The central learning objectives at the school of law are for each law student to:

(1) be able to identify and formulate the legal issues and theories that apply to the facts of a described situation or problem.

(2) have knowledge of, and ability to use, fundamental tools of legal research, including understanding the process of devising and implementing a coherent and effective research design.

(3) possess basic knowledge of the nature and sources of ethical standards of the legal profession, and processes for recognizing and addressing ethical dilemmas.

(4) show an understanding of the significance of being a member of the legal profession by striving to promote justice and fairness through the tradition of leadership and public service in a wide range of professional and other community involvement.

(5) have confidence in legal problem solving skills and concepts, including identifying and diagnosing a problem, determining the need for planning factual investigation, identifying and formulating relevant legal theories, generating alternative solutions and strategies, and developing and implementing a plan of action.

During the past year there were no changes in the goals and student learning objectives of the program of the School of Law.

What methods did you use to measure the student learning outcome objective(s) assessed since last year's report? Have there been any significant changes here? If so, please explain why. What measures do you propose to use next year? How are you addressing the reliability and validity of those measures?

In addition to traditional assessment devices such as interim and semester examinations and independent research papers, the methods used to measure student learning outcome objectives assessed since last year's report are described above under "Use of Assessment for Program Building and Improvement." The analysis of performance of graduates on each bar examination administered by the State Board of Law Examiners includes (a) a comparison of student performance on the various bar examination subject areas; (b) a comparison of our students' performance on the various subject areas with the performance by non-UALR examinees in the same subject areas; (c) an analysis by bar examination subject areas of scores earned by our graduates who fail the bar examination; and (d) compilation of a profile of UALR students failing the bar examination, including such data as (i) the failing student's undergraduate grade point average, (ii) the student's scores(s) on the Law School Admissions Test, (iii) the Law School division (full-time or part-time) from which the student graduated, (iv) the student's ethnicity, and (v) the student's class rank. The profile of each failing student is then compared to that of his or her classmates who passed the bar examination. Because any one bar examination is insufficient in itself as an indicator of the Law School's success in preparing its graduates for the practice of law, the Law School's assessment method requires that data from a span of years be accumulated to give a better picture of our students' strengths and weaknesses on the bar examination. Significant changes in measuring student learning outcome objective(s) assessed since last year's report include the surveys of students and employers as described in this report.

How does what you did this past year fit into the overall assessment plan for your program? Please include any changes you may have made to your plan in response to last year's feedback. Do you plan to make any changes in your assessment plan itself? What will your targets be for the coming assessment year?

Overall Assessment Plan for the School of Law Program

All that was done this year as assessment at the School of Law was either specifically contemplated by, or consistent with, our overall assessment plan. The following items that were accomplished this year are specifically called for in the School of Law Assessment Plan, as indicated by the material in brackets: the comprehensive surveys of students and employers of our graduates [Assessment Plan - “develop survey method to be used with employers of UALR students and graduates to determine competency level in identified skills and any additional skills employers believe curriculum should teach”]; requiring each faculty member to include in the faculty member's annual Professional Activity Report a statement on assessment methods used in teaching and changes planned as a result of assessment (beginning with the academic year 2003-04) [Assessment Plan - “require each faculty member to include in professional activity report the assessment methods used in teaching and changes planned as a result of assessment”]; Professor Susan Goldner of the School of Law Library faculty was added to the Assessment Committee [Assessment Plan - “add new member to the Assessment Committee”]; and reduction in course hours and semesterization of the required Constitutional Law and Torts courses [review curriculum in light of mission statement and identified objectives of legal education, and in light of external assessment received from Assessment Committee]. All other assessment activities undertaken during the year were consistent with and in furtherance of the School's overall assessment plan.

No changes have been made to the School of Law Assessment Plan in response to last year's feedback and no changes in the assessment plan are now contemplated.

School of Law Assessment Targets for the Coming Assessment Year

Assessment targets for the coming year at the School of Law will include:

(1) Analysis of Data from Student and Employer Surveys - As previously described, during the fall semester, 2002, the School of Law conducted comprehensive surveys of students and employers of our graduates. The data from those surveys will be analyzed during the 2003-04 academic year to identify any changes that should be made in any aspects of the School of Law's program, including individual courses. Copies of both the student and employer surveys and the survey results are attached to this report.

(2) Presentations by, and Consultations with, Legal Education Assessment

Expert - To date legal educators have given very little consideration to assessment specific to legal education. The School of Law Assessment Committee believes that development of the assessment effort at our law school could benefit substantially from consultation with a legal educator who is knowledgeable about assessment in legal education. Identifying such a person has been difficult because of lack of a legal education assessment network and because only a handful of legal educators have developed knowledge and skills specific to assessment in legal education. Through contact with the Institute for Law School Teaching housed at Gonzaga University School of Law, the Committee has determined that the leading authority on assessment in legal education is Professor Greg Munro of the University of Montana School of Law. Professor Munro is author of *Outcomes Assessment for Law Schools* and has a national reputation as a valuable source for consultation on assessment in legal education. The Committee has made initial contact with Professor Munro, and he has indicated that would be interested in visiting the UALR School of Law during the fall semester, 2003. During his visit, Professor Munro would make presentations on assessment in legal education and consult with the Committee and faculty. Professor Munro's visit will probably be contingent on securing funds from the University's assessment budget to cover the associated costs.

(3) Use of Results on Performance Test Portion of Bar Exam to Assess

Impact of Newly Required Lawyering Skills Courses - The Lawyering Skills sequence of courses (Lawyering Skills I & II) focusing on the pre-trial, trial and non-litigation skills employed by attorneys in law practice were instituted as required courses during the 2002-03 academic year. The institution of those courses coincides with the addition of a performance test component to the Arkansas Bar Examination. In 2004 the first group of students taking the newly required Lawyering Skills courses will graduate and take the Bar Exam performance test. The School will then attempt to assess the impact of the Lawyering Skills courses and other aspects of the skills curriculum on student success on the performance test.

(4) Inclusion of Assessment Activities in Faculty Professional Activity

Reports - As part of the Dean's plan for improving assessment at the School of Law, beginning with the academic year 2003-04 each faculty member will be required to include in the his or her annual Professional Activity Report a statement on assessment methods used in teaching and changes planned as a result of assessment. In addition, faculty participation in assessment activities will be considered in granting merit raises.

(5) Assessment Section on School of Law Web Page - The Committee is taking steps to create an assessment section on the School of Law web page. The assessment section will include a statement of student learning goals, objectives of the School of Law, and other relevant information.

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(6) Continuation of Ongoing Assessment Activities - For the coming year the School of Law will also continue to engage in all of the ongoing assessment activities described in this report.

Assessing Assessment (for information purposes only—not to be rated by readers panels):

a). What changes, if any, would you recommend in the assessment process in your college or in the university as a whole?

A number of changes in the assessment process are described above. In addition, the School of Law will continue to seek new avenues for collecting assessment data apart from the Bar Examination and to continue to encourage faculty to develop and share classroom assessment techniques. The School of Law has no recommendations for changes to the assessment process in the University as a whole.

b). What additional resources could the university provide that would be of most help to you in your assessment efforts?

As above indicated, to date legal educators have given very little consideration to legal education specific assessment. During the fall semester, 2003, the School of Law would like to invite to the School of Law campus Professor Greg Munro, the preeminent American legal educator with expertise in legal education specific assessment. Professor Munro would make presentations on assessment in legal education and consult with the Committee and faculty. Considering present budgetary constraints, the School of Law will most likely need to seek university resources outside the School of Law budget to cover the costs associated with Professor Munro's visit.

c). Please estimate what resources you have spent on assessment this last year, including both time and money.

The School of Law has received no funding for assessment activities. Since the Assessment Committee did not request that individuals involved in assessment activities report time and money expended, the Assessment Committee is unable to accurately estimate the amount of time or money spent on assessment except to say that the time devoted to assessment activities has been significant..

d). Courses offered through distance learning technologies are becoming a part of more and more programs. These courses should be treated like any other course offered by a department—including being part of the assessment of the program. For example, if students are supposed to include something from every upper-level course in their major, then they need to include distance as well as on-campus courses. What guidelines have you put into place to be sure that courses offered through distance learning technology are included in the assessment of the program?

The School of Law does not offer any distance learning course or courses utilizing distance learning technologies.