

**University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Assessment Progress Report Form / Spring 2004**

William H. Bowen School of Law

Degree Program: Juris Doctor (J.D.)
Department and College: Law, William H. Bowen School of Law
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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 Instruction Method

The most prevalent and effective assessment device used by faculty at the School of Law continues to be 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

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) 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 was required to include in his or her annual Professional Activity Report a statement on assessment methods used in teaching and changes planned as a result of assessment. Examples of the kinds of classroom assessment reported by faculty are attached to this Progress Report as Attachment 1. In addition, the Dean has considered faculty participation in assessment activities in granting merit raises.

(4) Assessment Page on School of Law Web Site

The School of Law has created an assessment web page, which includes a statement of student learning goals, objectives of the School of Law, and other relevant information.

(5) Legal Writing Diagnostic Test and Post-Test

Legal writing faculty administer 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. The test data are analyzed to determine whether changes should be made in 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 School Survey of Student Engagement

The *Law School Survey of Student Engagement* (LSSSE) is a new survey designed by the National Survey of Student Engagement to provide reliable, credible information about the quality of the law student experience. More than 4,300 students at eleven law schools completed the survey during a spring 2003 field test. The Bowen School of Law joins forty law schools in participating in the 2004 survey. LSSSE is co-sponsored by the Association of American Law Schools and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The survey asks students about their law school experience – how they spend their time, what they feel they've gained from their classes, their assessment of the quality of interactions with faculty and friends, and about important activities. Extensive research indicates that good educational practices in the classroom and interactions with others, such as faculty and peers, are directly related to high-quality student outcomes. The LSSSE focuses on these practices by assessing student engagement in key areas.

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?

During the 2003-2004 school year, faculty and students have increased their involvement in assessment at the classroom level, as reported in the assessment activities described in Attachment 1.

During the 2004-2005 school year, the School of Law administration and the school's Assessment Committee will determine the means of interpreting and sharing the results of the data gathered through the 2004 Law School Survey of Student Engagement.

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 sense of ethical and professional responsibility that is essential to counsel and represent the public successfully, competently, and professionally throughout their careers in law. The School's goal for graduates who will not use their degrees as practicing attorneys is that the skills, values, and knowledge gained in law school will enhance their effectiveness in other occupations. The central learning objectives at the school of law are for each law student to:

- (a) be able to identify and formulate the legal issues and theories that apply to the facts of a described situation or problem;
- (b) 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;
- (c) possess basic knowledge of the nature and sources of ethical standards of the legal profession and processes for recognizing and addressing ethical dilemmas;
- (d) 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;
- (e) 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?

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 School of Law 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 School of Law's success in preparing its graduates for the practice of law, the School of Law'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 participation in the 2004 national Law School Survey of Student Engagement.

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?

(1) Overall Assessment Plan for the School of Law Program

This year's assessment activities have been consistent with the School of Law's overall assessment plan.

Due to budgetary constraints, the School of Law was unable to arrange an assessment workshop with a legal education assessment expert during the 2003-2004 school year, but is pursuing plans for holding the workshop in the fall of 2004. One of our faculty members is presenting a program on classroom assessment techniques at the 2004 Conference of the Legal Writing Institute, and she will conduct a similar presentation for School of Law faculty in conjunction with the assessment workshop.

We will continue to add new faculty members to the Assessment Committee, both to replace retiring committee members and to increase faculty participation in assessment planning and implementation.

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.

(2) School of Law Assessment Targets for the Coming Assessment Year

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

(a) Analysis of Data from LSSSE

Prior to the beginning of the fall 2004 semester, LSSSE will provide the School of Law with a detailed analysis that includes:

- (i) Data file — a file of student responses that can be linked with other law school data;
- (ii) Institutional profile — a customized analysis (averages and percentages) of student responses grouped by class level.
- (iii) Aggregated comparative responses — information that compares our student responses to those of students from other law schools participating in the LSSSE 2004.

(b) Presentations by, and Consultations with, Legal Education Assessment Expert

The School of Law Assessment Committee is working to arrange a fall 2004 workshop to be conducted by 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. 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.

(c) Curricular Assessment of Lawyering Skills Courses

Upon reviewing the experience of the initial first few years of the required Lawyering Skills courses, the School of Law's Curriculum Committee has approved major modifications to the structure and instructional model of those courses. The courses will be re-evaluated by the Curriculum Committee during the 2004-2005 school year to determine whether they should continue to be required of all students.

(d) 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?

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?

During the 2004 fall semester, 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 to support assessment activities. Since the Assessment Committee does 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.

Attachment 1. Classroom Assessment Activities Reported by Law Faculty in Professional Activity Reports.

- In Advanced Evidence, students are required to prepare oral arguments on various types of expert testimony reviewed in the course. In class, students are divided into groups of three or four and then given a role as prosecution, defense, or judge. Students do not know which role they will be assigned ahead of time, so they must maintain a flexible approach to the evidence. The class then engages in simulated evidentiary hearings to determine the admissibility of the proffered evidence. The professor reserves the role of appellate judge, and critiques each of the groups' arguments.
- In Contracts II, students are assigned a client and are asked to solve a problem within a particular subject area. They must prepare legal arguments, using doctrinal authority and policy to support their position. The professor prepares PowerPoint for the sessions when the students meet to discuss their positions. The professor encourages various viewpoints, but insists that the arguments be supported by statutory provisions and/or caselaw.
- In Lawyering Skills II and Advanced Litigation Skills, students are required to submit a goal sheet for each assignment. The goal sheet is the student's analysis of the assigned problem. Students are required to review the videotapes of each workshop performance and complete a self-critique. Students are also required to complete a video program concerning trial objections.
- In Legal Clinic, students complete evaluations of clinic orientation and then the entire semester. Based on these specific evaluations, instructors expanded the mock interview segment of the orientation.
- In Legal Clinic, students meet weekly with instructors for a Case Status Review, where they evaluate progress made on a case. Mid-semester, students meet for an in-depth evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of their clinic work. Meeting mid-semester allows the instructor to tailor the remaining portion of the semester to help the student improve her participation.
- In Public International Law, students participate in advocacy simulations.
- In RWA, assignments are staggered to give students at least three opportunities to understand new concepts, in order to accommodate varying learning styles. First, students are assigned reading on the topic with exercises to prepare on their own for class discussion; second, the professor lectures on the topic and reviews the prepared exercises in class; and third, students then complete and turn-in an evaluative exercise on the concept.
- In RWA, a professor holds individual conferences with students, during which the professor evaluates, with the student, his or her individual work on any assignment. During conferences, the professor also offers feedback on working drafts of major assignments. As a means of promoting self-editing skills and self-assessment by the student, the professor employs a Socratic method when reviewing drafts so that students employed a process of legal writing, rather than producing an assimilated final product.

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- Another RWA professor uses ungraded online quizzes to allow students to self-evaluate their mastery of various topics. Students also complete written self-evaluations of the first memorandum, referenced to the skills mastery criteria used to this memorandum, and following students' research period for their final memorandum, students complete index card assessments of the "Most Important Thing" and the "Biggest Problem" encountered in research.
- The professor in one substantive law course holds optional review sessions at the end of the semester. The professor develops exams with both essay and short-answer questions to ensure that testing on the subjects was comprehensive and reviews the subjects selected for short-answer testing to determine whether those subjects were each adequately covered.
- Prior to the final, one professor hands out problems to work through in class and posts preparatory quizzes on TWEN.
- In another substantive law course, the professor gives "Tentative Assignment Schedules" for each week, handed out at the last class of the week and tailored to the next week's materials, with questions posed relative to each assignment or case. The questions are designed to focus the students' reading of the assignment materials. Although each question may not then be covered in class, the questions are designed to prepare students to participate in the classroom discussion. When apparently prepared students fumble, the professor is able to adjust his prep questions for the next year. This professor also makes audiotapes of each class and then listens to them in his prep for teaching the same material again the following year.
- One professor uses an exercise to allow students to assess and evaluate each other, while at the same time exploring each student's understanding of the rules, principles, and policies covered in the course. Students are given hypothetical transactions and are asked to advocate a position and represent a party in the transaction. Each advocate presents her argument and also critiques the other's application of the law to the facts. Finally, a student judge delivers an opinion that resolves the issues based on the positions advocated and the applicable law.