

**University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Assessment Progress Report Form / Spring 2006**

William H. Bowen School of Law

Degree Program: Juris Doctor (J.D.)
Department and College: Law, William H. Bowen School of Law
Prepared by: Bowen School of Law Assessment Committee: Susan D. Goldner, Professor of Law Librarianship (chair); Adjoa A. Aiyetoro, Assistant Professor of Law; Lindsey P. Gustafson, Assistant Professor of Legal Writing; Sarah Howard Jenkins, Charles Baum Distinguished Professor of Law; Suzanne Penn, Assistant Professor of Clinical Education

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) Long-Range Planning Committee Study of Arkansas Bar Examination Results

The primary assessment tool used by the School of Law is the Arkansas Bar Examination, administered twice each year by the Arkansas State Board of Law Examiners. In the 2004-2005 school year, the Long-Range Planning Committee of the School of Law commenced an in-depth study of bar passage data. This study included the following:

- Researching the scholarly literature on bar performance/predictors and summarizing the findings.
- Identifying all the providers of formal bar preparation programs and learning about their costs, their schedules, the materials they cover, the amount of Arkansas-specific material they contain, and the amount of time they require the participant to spend studying outside of class.
- Gathering detailed information about the Arkansas Bar Exam, including the topics it covers, how questions are created, how questions are graded and scored, and how the pass point is determined.
- Surveying law school academic associate deans to determine whether or not they offer bar preparation courses and/or other activities for enhancing their students' bar performance.

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- Surveying our recent alumni to gather information about their bar examination performance, their bar examination preparation activities, the amount of time spent in bar preparation, the bar courses taken during law school, and the subjects on the bar examination they considered most difficult.
- Performing a comprehensive comparison of student academic data and their subsequent bar examination performance data.
- Engaging the services of a statistician to aid in the review and analysis of both survey results.
- Preparing a written analysis of the results, including recommendations that the results suggest. See attachment 1 for this report.

The Committee's analysis of its findings indicates that factors such as taking a bar exam preparation course and spending more hours studying for the exam did not appear to affect the bar passage rate. The one factor that was a predictor of success on the bar exam was academic performance during law school. The general finding is that students who performed well in law school, regardless of whether they took the "bar courses" or not, were more likely to pass the bar exam than other students. This finding correlates with a study conducted by Prof. Lynn Foster in 2000.

The Committee's analysis of its findings led it to present eight recommendations to the School of Law's faculty and administration. The recommendations are as follows:

- Information about the bar exam should be provided systematically to students throughout their law school careers, beginning with the 1L orientation program.
- Students should be given access to this report and should be informed especially that academic success is the best predictor of success on the bar.
- The upper-level writing requirement should be reassessed for efficacy.
- The School of Law should strengthen and consolidate the academic support program and make bar preparation a goal of the program.
- The School of Law should provide supplemental bar review services available to all students, but especially available, if not compelled, for students who are identified as at risk.
- The School of Law should further tighten transfer standards and severely tighten readmission standards.
- The School of Law should allow not more than 22 hours at C- or lower to count toward the law degree, and the School of Law should require that students retake required courses upon a grade of C- or lower.
- This research should be disseminated to all administrators and faculty committees for their further consideration.

The School of Law acted on a number of these recommendations in 2005-2006. These activities included the following:

- Systematically providing information about the bar exam to students, beginning during the first year orientation program.

- Disseminating the report to all administrators and faculty committees for further consideration.
- Beginning to reassess the upper-level writing requirement.
- Strengthening and consolidating the academic support program by creating the new position of Associate Dean for Academic Support beginning in June 2006.
- Instructing this new dean to research and provide recommendations to the faculty for supplemental bar review services for our students.

2) Law School Survey of Student Engagement

The School of Law joined seventy-two other law schools in participating in the second annual Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE), in which approximately 28,000 law students were surveyed. The students answered questions about their academic environment and the effect it has on their learning, their satisfaction with the law school experience, and the ways they manage the many demands on their time. Among other topics covered by LSSSE were students' preparation for and participation in class, their academic relationships with other students and their professors, and their perceptions of the levels to which they felt challenged to meet high expectations.

LSSSE provided the School of Law with three kinds of data:

- (a) Data file — a file of student responses that can be linked with other law school data;
- (b) Institutional profile — a customized analysis (averages and percentages) of student responses grouped by class level.
- (c) Aggregated comparative responses — information that compares our student responses to those of students from other law schools participating in the LSSSE 2004. See attachment 2 for the summary.

The response that was most interesting to the faculty is that our students reported spending less time preparing for class and more time working at outside jobs than the average student nationally. The Curriculum Committee is in the process of trying to devise a plan for addressing this issue.

3) Classroom Assessment

(a) Socratic Dialogue Instruction Method

The School of Law continues to follow the Socratic Dialogue method of instruction as its most prevalent and effective classroom assessment device, which is a teaching technique 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.

(b) Other Faculty Classroom Assessment Activities

The most prevalent forms of classroom assessment involve problem-based application exercises, faculty-directed reviews, and reflective writing assignments, along with some specialized techniques for student self-assessment. See attachment 3 for detailed descriptions.

In March 2005, Professor Coleen Barger presented a faculty workshop entitled *Classroom Assessment Techniques for the Law School Professor: Ideas to Improve Both Teaching and Learning*. See attachment 4 for the handout from the workshop.

(c) Assessment in the Legal Clinic Programs

In Litigation Clinic, students complete evaluations of clinic orientation. In Mediation Clinic, Tax Clinic, and Litigation Clinic, students assess the entire clinical experience at the end of the semester. Students are asked to assess the supervisor's competence, the class component, and the general clinical experience itself.

Furthermore, the Litigation Clinic clients and the individuals who participate in mediation are given satisfaction surveys at the conclusion of the service. These surveys are used to help the clinic director and the supervisors in the individual clinics assess how effective the services were to the population receiving them. See attachment 5 for samples of assessment instruments used in the Clinics.

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?

(a) As a follow up to their August 2004 review of the LSSSE results, in the spring of 2005 the law faculty held a discussion about the similarities and differences of the part-time and full-time students.

(b) The Faculty Development Committee looked at both the LSSSE and the bar passage survey results. In March 2005, the Faculty Development Committee held a program led by Dr. Mark Taylor on teaching Generation NeXt. It was designed to encourage effective teaching by increasing the faculty's understanding of the current student body and incoming students.

(c) See Long-Range Planning Committee Study of Arkansas Bar Examination Results above for a description of the study, its results, recommendations, and resulting activities.

(d) In response to a LSSSE recommendation, the Admissions Committee considered tightening standards for admission of transfer students. The Committee decided not to change the standards.

(e) See Legal Clinic assessment programs above for a description of satisfaction surveys distributed to students, clients, and patrons of Litigation, Mediation, and Tax Clinics.

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?

(a) 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."

(b) The Bowen School of Law will participate in the 2006 LSSSE. It is anticipated that survey responses for 2006 will be tied to student GPA, which will mean that there is richer data to interpret.

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. 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

(a) Analyze Data from 2005 and 2006 LSSSE

Analyze the data received from the 2005 and 2006 LSSSE. It is expected that the LSSSE will do a more sophisticated analysis of the results in 2006, including tying students' responses to their grade point average. With this additional information and with data from three years to examine, faculty and administrators at the School of Law will get an even clearer picture of the students' experiences.

(b) Continue On-Going Assessment of Curriculum

In response to the Long Range Planning Committee recommendations, the Curriculum Committee will continue its review of the upper-level writing requirement. This will include an alumni survey in an attempt to gauge the adequacy of their preparation as legal writers.

(c) Examine Grade Standards

In response to the Long Range Planning Committee recommendations, the Curriculum Committee will consider changing number of grades of C- or lower allowed to count toward graduation and requiring that students retake required courses with a grade of C- or less.

(d) Examine Readmission Standards

In response to the Long Range Planning Committee recommendations, the Readmission Committee will consider raising readmission standards.

(e) Provide the Bar Passage Report to Students

The School of Law will give students access to the report of the Long-Range Planning Committee on the Preparation of Bowen Law Students for the Arkansas Bar Exam and inform them that academic success is the best predictor of success on the bar.

(f) Continue 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?

Next year's Assessment Committee should consider redoing the alumni/employer survey done in July 2002, in order to augment student and alumni survey data with employer perceptions.

The School of Law Assessment Committee will 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?

To the extent that the University could provide assessment funds to assist the School of Law, we would like to use those resources to bring in speakers, conduct workshops, and otherwise improve the level and quality of our assessment activities.

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.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1. Report and Recommendations of the Long-Range Planning Committee on the Preparation of Bowen Law Students for the Arkansas Bar Exam.

Attachment 2. 2005 LSSSE Report

Attachment 3. Classroom Assessment Activities Reported by Law Faculty in Professional Activity Reports.

Attachment 4. Hand-out from the Faculty Workshop on Classroom Assessment Techniques for the School of Law Professor.

Attachment 5. Legal Clinic Evaluation Instruments.

Attachments are not appended to the on-line version of the School of Law's Assessment Progress Report, but are available for inspection upon request to the Office of the Dean at the Bowen School of Law or the Chair of the Assessment Committee.