

What Is The Role of The Dean Internally?

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“In time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exist.”

The aforementioned timeless statement attributed to American social writer and philosopher, Eric Hoffer, sums up the major challenge faced by law school deans all over the world.

In a highly charged and rapidly changing period that we live in, law deans are expected to re-invent themselves, scan the horizon for trends and directions, be catalysts for change, lead by example and produce lawyers who are prepared to deal with complex issues of the century. What is crucial is to set the tone for instilling not just a quench for learning and quest for excellence on the part of the students but in involving them in programs and activities that prepare and train them to be society’s leaders in the era of “consequences” and a certainly uncertain future.

Background: Legal Education in the Philippines

The Commission on Higher Education formulates the principles and policies governing Legal Education in the Philippines, in addition to the bar examination requirements of the Supreme Court of the Philippines.

The objectives of Legal Education in the Philippines are as follows:

- (a) To prepare students for the practice of law
- (b) To produce especially committed members of the legal profession of competence and integrity with an awareness of the needs of deprived and oppressed sectors
- (c) To train persons for national leadership, and
- (d) To contribute toward the promotion and advancement of justice and the improvement of its administration, the legal system and legal institutions in the light of historical and contemporary development in the country and in other countries of the world.

In essence, Legal Education in the Philippines emphasizes a law program which molds the law students not only to strive for excellence but to actively promote the administration of justice and law reforms, as may be needed; produce competent and ethical lawyers, with a heart for the marginalized sectors; and enmesh them in an environment that serves as training ground for leadership roles in the community.

Role of the Dean in achieving the goals of the State and the law school

The Dean is the face of the Bar at the College (or School) of Law. His integrity, core values, positive attitude and leadership skills spell the difference in creating a generation of “learners” or the “learned” and in achieving the vision, mission and goals of the State and the institution.

The Dean’s challenging role is made easier by a team of faculty members who are not only skilled and updated in their respective areas of specialization but are participatory in the affairs of the College, open-minded, adaptive to changing circumstances, and are “learners” and “doers,” as well. They are his partners in inspiring the students to be empowered agents of change in their respective spheres of influence, not tomorrow, but in their present journey to become full-pledged members of the Bar.

In integrating community services as part of the Law Curriculum, the students benefit not only from the application of their knowledge gained in law school. Hopefully, seeds of compassion and appreciation of the importance of the Rule of Law will be embedded as part of their life values and in performing their role as stewards of the law and as leaders of society.

This is particularly important in a developing country like the Philippines where the Rule of Law unfortunately has to take a back seat, at times. The system of patronage politics still dominates, and are allowed to continue to dominate by cultural nuances, poverty and lack of education by a large part of the population.

Only an empowered citizenry, ably steered by determined and committed lawyers in promoting the Rule of Law, can affect the necessary changes in the existing political landscape. Such is the peculiar significance of law schools in molding the core values of those aspiring to be lawyers, in a relatively young Republic, such as the Philippines.

Governance of a Law School

Leadership by example cannot be over emphasized. To achieve the goals of a quality and life-changing Legal Education program, the four elements of good governance that citizens unceasingly demand from Government – participatory, transparent, accountable and predictable – are as indispensable in the governance of law schools. The Dean ensures that these factors are hallmarks of his administration.

The stakeholders in a law school include the faculty and the students, school officials, staff, librarian, parents/spouse of the law students, alumni, corporate funders, non-government and people's organizations and of course, the public sector members. For efficient and effective governance, the stakeholders are encouraged to participate in crafting, adopting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the various programs and activities of the law school. There is sustainability of programs and activities if they are part of the endeavor, from the initial phase up to the end of the life of the Program.

Some of the law schools programs that involve the students and faculty members as key players are the Legal Aid Program, curriculum development, web site, voters' education and the recent off-site voters' registration Project.

While UC College of Law is only seven years old, its Legal Aid Program is one of the two accredited by the Supreme Court among six Cebu-based law schools. It is in the forefront of pursuing environmental cases in Cebu, Philippines.

The Supreme Court also accredited the law school as a service provider for the Mandatory Continuing Legal Aid Program for Lawyers. It has hosted three complete and one short MCLE Courses since 2006 on subject matters such as sustainable development, climate change, environmental law, electronic law and evidence, among others. The students and the faculty work together in the implementation of the aforesaid continuing Programs.

The UC Law Curriculum is a product of the engagement between the faculty members and the students. It is a work-in-progress geared towards enhancing the capability of the students to meet and answer the demands of the 21st century, with courses such as International Business Practice, Environmental Law, Information Technology, Alternative Dispute Resolution and Intellectual Property. There is a plan to improve the curriculum further by integrating sustainability and global social responsibility in the courses of the law curriculum, as the institution's response to the global financial crunch and climate crisis.

The law school's web site (<http://www.uclaw.org/>) is student-operated, in close collaboration with the law school.

A recent project of the law school's Local Government and Election Law course involved five barangays,¹ UC, other universities and schools and the Commission on Elections. (COMELEC) The off-site Voters' Registration Project which allowed the citizens to register for the 2010 national and local elections in the comfortable atmosphere of the school campus, not in the cramped office of the local COMELEC. The choice of such an activity emanated from the law students, endorsed by the law professor and supported by the law school Dean and the university management. The citizens and law students went home satisfied with the event's success. The COMELEC officer was very happy with the result and is willing to do more collaboration with the different universities. The event was highlighted by media, which triggered an avalanche of replication requests from the public. See this link: <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/uc-law-students-register-340-voters>

The Dean as Leader/Manager

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do.

- Leonardo da Vinci

The Dean plays a key role in engaging the institution, which he represents, in a partnership with the other key players of society to help improve the administration of justice and strengthen the Rule of Law. Under his stewardship, forums, roundtable and other activities that positively impact policies and decisions of stakeholders are given focus.

The Dean, like any head of academic institutions, similarly with his counterparts in the private and public sectors, is not exempt from external pressures. The intensity may be more in the Philippines because of the personality-oriented culture that prevails.

How the Dean wards off such pressures depends on many factors, the most important of which is the consistent support coming from the management of the university and the stakeholders. Adopting the principles of transparency, accountability, predictability (following the law and policies) and the participation of stakeholders, will go a long way in keeping the office of the Dean away from the clutches of politicians, parents, donors and vested interests.

Status

In a country where passing the Bar is considered a rare privilege that brings honor not only to the person but to his or her family and law school, being considered for Deanship is already an honor by itself.

The position carries with it prestige, respect and tremendous responsibility. It is thus important that the occupant possesses the integrity, competence and inspiring leadership skills which law students can imbibe, when they go out on their own in the practice of Law.

Conclusion

With globalization, the Law Deans must also widen his sphere of knowledge and horizons. Thus, the University of Cebu College of Law Dean's eager participation in this IALS Conference on the *Role of Law Schools and Law School Leadership in a Changing World*. Hopefully, the lessons learned in this important conference will be transmitted to our learners who will be the leaders in the future.

¹ smallest political unit in the country