

The Dean as An Integral Member of The Legal Profession

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The central mission of law schools is to prepare students for the profession of law.¹ However, law schools have important goals and objectives that extend beyond that. Among these are research, capacity building, community service, and outreach. In pursuing these non-teaching objectives, law schools contribute to improvements in law and legal institutions. To be optimally effective in these areas, a law school should be perceived — and perceive itself— as an integral part of the legal profession.² If a law *school* is to be perceived as an integral *part* of the legal profession, its *dean* must conduct himself or herself as an integral *member* of the legal profession.

Legal academics communicate with one another through their published scholarship, academic conferences, faculty meetings, and hallway conversation. There are many examples of how their scholarship has influenced the development of law and legal institutions. Today, the body of legal scholarship is more accessible than it has ever been. It is readily available to be considered and used by practitioners, legislative bodies, policy makers, and courts. And yet, to some members of the legal community, it may seem that legal academics are speaking only to one another, with little interest in effecting improvements in substantive and procedural law and little concern for the professional lives of legal practitioners.³ In my experience, this is not the case.

Law professors are highly talented intellectuals who aspire to promote law reform through their scholarship and teaching. They want to contribute to improvements in public policy and the performance of the legal profession. They want their work to have an impact in the real world. It would be a loss for society to allow barriers to stand between their thoughtful work and the members of the legal profession, for it is practitioners and policy makers who are in positions to implement the reforms that legal academics advocate. The dean can serve as a bridge between the legal academy and the legal profession, fostering dialog and mutual respect between these two sectors of the legal profession and thereby improving the effectiveness of both the practicing bar and the dean's law school.

In my interactions with bar leaders and rank and file lawyers, I have discovered a level of interest and deference that can be leveraged to make the law school more

¹ WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN, ET AL., *EDUCATING LAWYERS: PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSION OF LAW* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

² Lawrence K. Hellman, *Conceptualizing a Law School as an Integral Part of the Legal Profession*, 36 U. TOLEDO L.REV. 73 (2004).

³ See, e.g., Harry Edwards, *The Growing Disjunction between Legal Education and the Legal Profession*, 91 MICH. L. REV. 34 (1992).

relevant to the practicing bar and judiciary. There appears to be a thirst within the profession to be engaged with legal scholars, or at least conversant with their work. By conducting oneself as an active member of the legal profession, the dean will find many opportunities to create greater awareness of the law school's faculty and programs, which can enhance their influence.

The dean might serve on committees of the bar and attend important bar association functions, creating contacts and visibility that foster interest in the law school and opportunities to call attention to the research and initiatives it supports. Simply by putting himself or herself in these environments, the dean rebuts the inference that the law school wishes to stand apart from the legal profession and is uninterested in the accomplishments and problems of its members. In these settings, the dean may discover educational or employment opportunities for students, research opportunities for faculty, and fundraising opportunities for the law school. The more visible the law school is in such forums, the greater its stature and influence will be.

The dean should also become a fixture at important professional and social events in the life of the bar and the judiciary. Annual meetings, judicial conferences, swearing-in ceremonies, retirement receptions, and meetings of various bar groups provide occasions for the dean to demonstrate the school's interest in the work of the legal profession and the desire to be engaged with it.

Through the dean's presence at professional functions, the dean will be turned to for advice and counsel on issues considered critical to the profession. By being attuned to issues confronting the profession, the dean can bring information to faculty that may encourage them to conduct research and organize academic conferences that will address those issues, be they substantive or professional.

If the dean has become a presence at bar functions, members of the profession and the judiciary will be more likely to reciprocate the dean's outreach to the profession by attending programs presented by the law school. Similarly, the dean's invitation to bar leaders and jurists to attend law school activities such as orientations and commencements will be well-received and, when accepted, lead to a familiarity with the law school that will enhance its credibility. The law school will be seen as an institution with energy, insight, and the capacity to contribute to both the legal profession and the legal system. Its programs that are intended to encourage reform will be better attended and, thus, more likely to result in the implementation of the advocated reforms.

The dean's personal relationships with judges and leaders of sub-groups within the bar will generate opportunities to invite courts to hear arguments and professional entities to hold meetings at the law school. This will be beneficial to the school's students, and it will also provide an opportunity to bolster the school's reputation among

opinion leaders in the profession. These opportunities will be even greater if the dean finds projects in which the law school can join with a professional organization on subjects of mutual interest. The familiarity created by all of these interactions may lead to appointments and consulting positions for faculty members, providing them with platforms to implement their ideas for improving law and the legal system.

Through the dean's activities as an integral member of the legal profession, the dean's law school will find occasions to exert leadership within the profession. The school will be taken more seriously, enjoy greater respect, and project more influence than would otherwise be the case. To be sure, the dean has many important and difficult internal responsibilities. But as the "face" of the law school, only the dean can have the presence and cultivate the relationships that will bring these benefits to the institution.

The dean is both the internal leader and the external spokesperson for the law school. As an integral member of the legal profession, the dean can maximize the external influence of the intellectual capital collected in the law school. At the same time, this orientation as a key player in the legal profession will enable the dean to prevent the law school from becoming irrelevant to the profession and society it exists to serve.