

Thomas Jefferson on the Leading Edge in Skills Training

by Dean Rudy Hasl

Following the publication of the MacCrate Report, the CLEA Best Practices and, most recently, the Carnegie Report, the Thomas Jefferson School of Law has been a leader in the development of programs that introduce students to professional skills that ease their entry into the practice of law. Skills are introduced from the very start of a student's career in law school and continue even after graduation, with our newly developed incubator program and with continuing education programs.

Recognizing the importance of developing practice-ready graduates, our faculty members have developed a combination of simulation experiences; externships with law firms, judges and government entities; and live client clinical opportunities. The faculty members have taken to heart the admonition in the Carnegie Report that the focus of professional training programs must be the "formation" of the new professional, integrating knowledge, the theoretical foundation, practical skills, good judgment and problem solving, and high ethical standards. The clinical programs provide students with the experience of modeling professional behavior with real clients.

Our programs have focused on veterans, who have hit rock bottom and are being rehabilitated through the Veterans Village of San Diego, and on developing entrepreneurs among the immigrant populations in San Diego, who are seeking to establish businesses and need help in navigating through the complex regulatory environment, as well as artists and entertainers who need help in protecting their works and achievements.

The School has established a law clinic on the 1st floor of its new, elegant, award-winning facility at 1155 Island Avenue in the East Village. The entrance to the clinic is on 11th Street between Island and J Streets. The space provides easy access for clients and a professional environment where faculty supervisors can model professional behavior for students and clients and where students have individual secure workspaces, with equipment, to service the needs of the clients.

The Veterans Legal Assistance Clinic is under the supervision of Professor Steve Berenson, an experienced clinician, and the business and entrepreneurship clinic is under the supervision of Professor Luz Herrera, with the assistance of Professor Jeff Slattery, who focuses on the program for artists and entertainers. A new addition to the clinic will be an experienced California attorney, who will work directly with our students in providing valuable services to the clients.

In establishing these areas of concentration, Professor Herrera met with other legal service providers and community organizations to determine where there were

unmet needs that could be addressed by the clinical programs. Moving from Old Town to our new East Village location provided the opportunity to assess what needs existed in our community and how the law school could best serve those needs. The law school will continue its very successful VITA program to provide tax help to low-income taxpayers.

Since the School is a relatively young ABA-approved law school, fully approved only in 2001, many of our graduates are going into small firm or solo practice settings. Recognizing the need to do something special to prepare our students and graduates for such practice settings, the faculty members have embraced a model of education that provides the strong theoretical foundation for "thinking like a lawyer," but it also has added skills components in the more traditional courses and many opportunities to develop the essential practice skills and values that are highlighted in the MacCrate Report and the Carnegie Report.