

# The Value of A Legal Education:

## A Transformative Experience That is Measured Over a Lifetime

by Dean Rudy Hasl

As the longest serving law school dean, having served at four ABA-Approved schools over the past 30 years, I have seen volatile swings in the demand for legal education and employment opportunities. While the current economic climate has been particularly difficult, it's important to review what is happening in the context of the last 40 years within the profession and legal education.

Firms have adjusted to economic realities while decreasing opportunities for in-house training for young lawyers. In response, law schools are introducing more skills oriented courses and programs that prepare graduates for small-firm and solo-practice settings. Thomas Jefferson is developing a solo practice track and will soon be launching an incubator program.

I want to address more fundamental questions: What is the value of a legal education and how does one measure it? Much of the criticism about legal education and of the lawsuits filed by graduates against law schools is the employability of graduates at graduation or a short time thereafter. I firmly believe this emphasis is wrong-headed and dangerous. Instead, examine the span of a career to determine the value of the educational experience.

I did not expect to receive numerous offers to join firms after my graduation and bar passage, even though I had done very well in law school. My classmates felt the same but we knew that we could use our education in so many different settings. My first job as a lawyer was during the Vietnam era handling military trials. My education had provided the fundamental skills to represent clients effectively and I enjoyed trial work. Although I pursued positions as a trial attorney after my service obligations, I received an opportunity I could not resist teaching new generations of lawyers.

In those early years, we did not have a career services office. The faculty and alumni worked with students to build networks that might lead to employment. And our graduates were employed. They are now the senior partners at larger firms or they have established their own practices. Most of them experienced transition during their first few years, until they found those special opportunities they wanted to pursue. Most significant about the educational experience is that it prepared us for a profession with ever-changing expectations. I often tell students that we are preparing them to function as a lawyer when they graduate, but more importantly to be able to function at the height of their careers in 2040, when the work environment is likely to be radically different than it is in 2012.

I was a Classics major, in Latin and Greek. If I were to measure that major against employability at graduation, I would be hard pressed to justify the tuition. But as I look over a life enriched by that educational experience, I believe it was invaluable and well worth the investment. My education was a transformative experience that has provided a lifetime of rewards that cannot be measured by the initial job after graduation. Whether you use your education in the traditional practice of law, in business, or in political life, the unique problem solving and communication skills that are part of the legal education process have enduring value. At Thomas Jefferson, we observe that value in the extraordinary successes of graduates like Duncan Hunter, Lillian Lim, Marc Adelman, Bonnie Dumanis, Henry Coker, and Roger Benitez.

I urge you to talk with the media and others about the value of your legal education. Share your stories of success and satisfaction made possible through legal education. Don't allow the critics to

undervalue a legal education and discourage others from pursuing the dream of becoming a lawyer. The law degree is a hard-earned achievement that continues to reward throughout a professional lifetime.