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My view: Legal education needs to be a global, not local, issue

BY CAROLYN B. LAMM - SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD
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Legal education is in flux. It has been criticized for being too expensive and for failing to prepare lawyers to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's clients, where "non-legal" competencies such as entrepreneurship, project management or big data analytics will be ever more essential. Much of the discussion has taken place as if the United States were alone in facing these issues; however, much of legal practice today touches on the global.

For the past five years, somewhat under the radar, a highly successful project has shown that things can be done differently. It is called LawWithoutWalls.

The course, at the University of Miami's School of Law, grew out of the conviction that legal practice and education both face major change, that issues are global and interdependent. There is a need for a multidisciplinary community of students and professionals to accelerate innovation and to sharpen the skills required by 21st century professional advisors that are not "teachable" in a traditional

training format. The number of law schools that originally joined in the venture has grown from five to 22, and four business schools have been added to the mix. The number of volunteer mentors and experts has grown to include over 400 professionals from six continents.

The program continues to test new offerings. Last year, six of the schools successfully piloted an all-virtual LWOW X; since it involves no student travel, this carries the potential of a widely available low-cost version of the program. This year, the LWOW INC. will be the only law school that serves as an incubator dedicated to startups in the legal industry/law market only.

In January, some 60 law and business school students will meet at University College Dublin, Sutherland School of Law. They will have come from Australia, China and India, South Africa, North and South America, Iceland, Israel, the U.K. and Continental Europe. In all, students from 26 of the world's leading law and business schools will attend.

They will spend a "full immersion" weekend working with an equally-sized legion of academics, practicing lawyers, consultants, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and an improv coach or two. The students, individual strangers when they arrive, will leave as three person teams. They face three months of challenging work; they have to identify a discrete problem in legal education or practice and solve it. Each team presents the project it has worked on at the culminating event in mid-April in Miami, where a panel of judges including practitioners, academics, business professionals and venture capitalists critique the business plans.

Past projects have gone on to find funding such as Traffick Junction, a website connecting volunteers and professionals fighting human trafficking worldwide. The project received recognition and funding from the United Nations. Currently, Traffick Junction has combined forces with an organization called Chab Dai, to create the Freedom Collaborative.

But most important, several hundred students, from an enormous range of cultures, backgrounds, languages, educational tracks, and legal systems have learned to work as teams, resolve problems, work across time zones – all under pressure to produce quality work. And they have thrived. Each adds to the community of young law and business students significantly better equipped to deal with the global world than their contemporaries. It is not just the students but also the mentors and others working with the students that benefit from the stream of innovative ideas that are shared and then brought to life with the latest technology available.

We believe this program marks a promising path in an increasingly complex and connected world. It serves to prepare the next generation of capable and honorable interdisciplinary problem-solvers.

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