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Law Students & Mentors Across the Globe Team Up to Develop New Approaches to the Legal Profession

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Photo of Rachel M. Zahorsky by Marc Hauser.

BREAKING BARRIERS TO INNOVATION IN EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

Disquiet and frustration with the state of legal education and law practice has led two professors to create a cyber-based program that spans international time zones and school rankings to design a new legal profession from scratch.

LawWithoutWalls is a collaborative academic model that brings together students and faculty from 11 international law schools and one business school, law practitioners, business professionals, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists to develop innovative solutions to problems facing law school and practice.

“We needed to do something that involved students and teams, built bridges with the business community and embraced out-of-the-box ideas,” says Michele DeStefano, founder and co-creator of LawWithoutWalls and a professor at the University of Miami School of Law. DeStefano leads LWW with co-creator Michael Bossone, special adviser to the dean at Miami Law.

The program’s premise mirrors that of successful tech companies: Toss out past blueprints and design original business models. There is no IRAC—the issue, rule, application and conclusion exam formula so familiar to law students—only a swiftly evolving market and a controversial or unsettled topic. Small groups of students and mentors collaborate and reimagine legal business models. Then they determine where their projects can make a real economic difference.

Topics for 2012 include seeking ways to combine cultures and systems into global law practice, questioning disaggregation of legal services, and providing access to justice.

“There’s nothing like this in the law,” says mentor Hugh Totten, a partner at Valorem Law Group in Chicago. “They are learning skills that are anticipatory to the profession —skills that are not necessarily used every day today, but they will be.

“Students use their legal background and industry knowledge along with business analytical tools to create something ... that doesn’t exist,” Totten says. “That never happens in legal education.”

Exploding traditional law firm models and refusing to accept “factory” positions drew lawyer/consultant [Jordan Furlong](#) to

the program.

“The diversity of the students and the originality of the subjects really highlight the contrast between [LWW]

and traditional legal education, where most classes are planned, taught and graded in the same ways. [Traditional] law students learn to think the same,” says Furlong, an Ottawa, Ontario-based partner with the global consulting firm Edge International.

“LawWithoutWalls students don’t approach the legal profession and marketplace with assumptions of how things ought to be done,” he says. “They bring fresh eyes.”

Some projects have drawn the attention of investors, but it’s the incubation of ideas that most excites Bossone.

“You are energized just from hearing the ideas,” he says, comparing the final presentations of student projects to TED conferences.

“Most ideas from TED never become businesses,” Bossone says, “but just putting those ideas out into the universe, so much energy comes from that experience.”

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