Innovative "law without walls" program has U.S. law schools partnering with each other as well as foreign institutions

From Time Magazine:

Partnering with institutions like Harvard Law School, University College London Faculty of Laws and the Peking University School of Transnational Law in Shenzhen, China, LawWithoutWalls uses state-of-the-art technology to share new legal concepts and tools across borders and in tandem with experts from fields like business, who often join the interface along with legal scholars. "We're taking the dynamic interaction that happens in a real law classroom and applying it to an online process across cultures and disciplines," says Michael Bossone, a program co-creator who had to experiment with various Web applications (Zoho works best against the "Great Firewall" of China) to make it all function.

In this class, the lecture hall is cyberspace, a videoconference linking students and professors in places as far-flung as Miami and Shenzhen. And the topic on this particular day isn't torts — it's the controversial boom in legal-process outsourcing (LPO) and other cost-saving devices for law firms.

At the top right of the screen, Bao Shengyuan, 28, a student at Peking Transnational, asks about pitfalls:
"Shouldn't there be ethical obligations for nonlawyers who provide assistance outside the firm?" Former American Bar Association President Carolyn Lamm agrees. She raises issues like protection of client information when LPO workers in countries like India, and not a firm's own associates, review case documents, especially via the Internet. "We're witnessing the restructuring of the legal profession," she says, "but we still have to ensure rules like attorney-client privilege."

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One goal of LawWithoutWalls is to prepare today's law students — who are graduating into one of the bleakest hiring landscapes in memory — for all sorts of different global legal work, like trade litigation: for example, since 2005, annual caseloads at the American Arbitration Association's International Centre for Dispute Resolution have risen more than 50%.

Another big shift that the program aims to illuminate is the "commoditization" of law, embodied by Britain's 2007 Legal Services Act. It permits nonlawyer ownership of law firms and lets them offer nonlegal products like financial services — a reform many legal purists decry as barbarians crashing the bar, though backers insist it improves competition and access to legal services. When this semester's 23 LawWithoutWalls students (who also hail from Fordham Law School and New York School of Law) gathered at a Miami conference in April to present course projects, University College London student Anna Pope found herself clueing U.S. students in to the new "alternative business structures" of British law — and their potential conflicts. If a law firm can be listed on a stock exchange, Pope asked, should it represent a plaintiff suing a bank with which many of the firm's shareholders have accounts?

Either way, "lawyers everywhere have to be more commercial-minded today," says Pope, 31, an attorney training to be a professor. "This course is a
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