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A Seminar Connects Law Students Around the World

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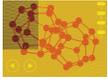
Each week this spring, two dozen law students from the United States, England, and China logged on to their laptops simultaneously to discuss challenges facing their profession and to brainstorm creative solutions.

Joining them were lawyers, professors, venture capitalists, and entrepreneurs who offered real-world expertise. Most of their meetings took place in a virtual classroom created by scholars at the University of Miami School of Law.

The "LawWithoutWalls" program provides "a possible paradigm for collaborative global education that far extends beyond legal education," says Michele DeStefano Beardslee, an associate professor of law at Miami who helped establish the project.

The recent participants included 23 students from six law schools: those at Fordham and Harvard Universities and the University of Miami; New York Law School; University College London; and Peking University School of Transnational Law.

The course began in January, with an in-person session in London, and ended last month, with a meeting in Miami where projects were presented. In between, students met at scheduled times using Adobe Connect, a Web-based meeting application. A morning class for the East Coast students required students in China to log on late in the evening.



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Students' home institutions paid for their travel to the two conferences, and Miami paid for the other program costs. The program may be expanded next year to include business schools, says one of its creators, Michael Bossone, a special adviser to Miami's law-school dean, Patricia D. White.

Each student in the LawWithoutWalls program was paired with a student in another country and assigned an unresolved or controversial topic related to legal education or practice. Topics included alternative billing strategies and the lack of business skills among law-school graduates. After researching its assigned topic, each team zeroed in on a narrow problem. The student teams communicated weekly, in virtual meetings, with one of their two mentors—one from academe and one lawyer, business person, or judge.

The students were asked to solve a problem and communicate it to the other students using such approaches as a business plan, computer program, or three-dimensional architectural model. They presented weekly updates on wikis, or collaborative Web sites.

Anna Pope, a student at University College London, teamed up with Kirsten Heenan, of Harvard, on a study of controversial British legislation, the Legal Services Act of 2007. The legislation has created more competition for lawyers in England and Wales by opening up the practice of law to other professionals and allowing lawyers and nonlawyers to join in new business structures.

Ms. Pope and Ms. Heenan created a Web site, with discussion forums, for examining how the legislation is affecting the legal profession. Ms. Pope says the virtual classroom provided a rich

global network.

"When you see everyone on the screen in real time, you don't feel like you're talking into a machine," she says. "You kind of forget you're connected with people all around the world. The wealth and breadth of experience is amazing."

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