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UM law program links students across globe

LawWithoutWalls is a virtual academic model designed to teach students about real-world issues through web-based software.

Deborah C. Espana

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The University of Miami School of Law intends to break down classroom barriers Saturday when it launches its LawWithoutWalls program in London.

LawWithoutWalls is a virtual academic model designed to teach students about real-world issues through web-based software.

"Essentially LawWithoutWalls is part virtual academic model designed to innovate legal education and practice," said Michele DeStefano Beardslee, associate professor of law and founder of LawWithoutWalls. "We live in a world that's globalized where the lines of what is business and law is anything but clear."

LawWithoutWalls has 23 students enrolled from six law schools in the United States, London and China. Students will connect virtually using web conferencing software with a professor and a practitioner mentor every week for an hour to discuss a project.

"This is a progressive class. This isn't boring law school where you're instilled fear," said Casey Dieck, a second-year law student at the University of Miami. "This isn't an 86-year old man teaching you."

The three-credit course began Thursday and runs through April 9.

At the end, the students will be expected to present a project in front of lawyers and entrepreneurs at the University of Miami.

"What's unusual is that it's a collaborative effort of a broad-based group of people in the context of a course. But it's a work in progress. It's really a collaborative effort to think about evolving issues — unique to my knowledge," University of Miami law school dean Patricia White said. "It's a broad range of people from different institutions thinking corroboratively about evolving issues in the context of a course."

Topics include ethics and efficiency issues raised by outsourcing legal services and lawyers' workspace in the digital age.

UM law professor Robert Rosen will navigate his way through the virtual world and teach the course in addition to his usual load of classes. Rosen, who usually has 90 to 100 students, will be working closely with two students on outsourcing.

Instead of having a large class, he'll have "students working one on one with me. Although they do that with papers, this will be students from different schools and different backgrounds," he said. "I've never had that before. I've never worked with practitioners,

and I never tried to teach with practitioners."

Students might develop an iPhone app for billable hours or an architectural plan to embrace technology in the courtroom, Beardslee said.

"What's unique about this program is that as far as I know, it is the first effort to have a serious collaboration between many of the stakeholders in the context of a course," White said. "Thinking about changing the legal environment that involves students and professors from different law schools, practitioners from many different places and legal entrepreneurs."

Dieck already has met online with a New York Law School student who will work with her on a project.

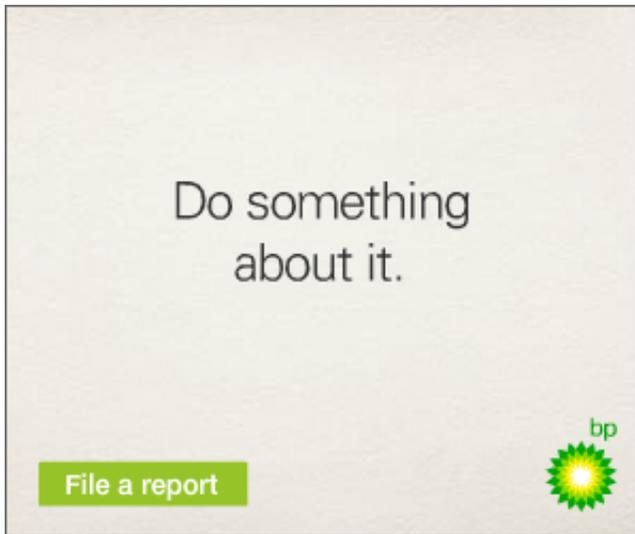
"These types of projects are the future where you have 20 people from three different countries and four different cities," she said. "This is the kind of work that I want to do. You get to connect with professionals that have an extensive resume and extensive work experience."

The class includes six University of Miami students, four from Peking University School of Transnational Law, four from University College London, three from Harvard University, two from Fordham University and four students from New York Law School.

"LawWithoutWalls is for those who dare to be different, said Michael Bossone, executive team member and is a special adviser to White. "To succeed, lawyers need to build a broad and diverse skill set that will allow them to appreciate the importance of human connection."

Students who were admitted went through a rigorous application process where they submitted an application, interviewed with professors and presented their ideas and potential contributions, White said.

"LawWithoutWalls is designed to change the way lawyers are trained to think and more, so how they contribute to the world that is globalized digital and trans-disciplinary," Beardslee said.



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