Legal education in the future tense

The Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law has embarked on an ambitious transformation designed to reimagine 21st century legal education. While most schools remain mired in a 19th century vision of law, based on a model pioneered over a hundred years ago, we believe legal education must always be in the future tense, focusing on the future of law and legal practice and training students for a world very different from the one we have experienced in the past.

What are the hallmarks of a legal education in the future tense?

It breaks down barriers.

There should be no artificial barriers to a quality legal education. Therefore, while our admissions standards are among the highest in the nation, we have added ways to study law that recognize the multitasking nature of contemporary life. For example, we now offer a flexible scheduling option that allows students juggling other responsibilities to take the first-year curriculum more slowly, over as long as 21 months. In addition, students will be able to receive some of their credits through online courses and other credits through an astonishing array of pre-professional externships, both in the Phoenix metropolitan area and around the country. Finally, our innovative new Washington, D.C., Externship Program allows you to take a full semester of classes and pursue externships from our faculty stationed in the nation's capital.

But the barriers we are breaking down are not just logistical. Law increasingly branches out to other academic disciplines for insights, and a lawyer today must be able to process and understand complex policy data. At the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, we certainly have an admirably interdisciplinary faculty. But, in keeping with the truly electrifying innovation going on across our university, we are going much further than that. Partnering with the new transdisciplinary institutions on campus, the College of Law is engaging in scholarship and teaching that sits not *within* a particular school, but *between* schools. Imagine a gathering of world leaders, scientists, and legal scholars at the state-of-the-art Decision Theater on the Arizona State University campus, modeling long-term consequences of possible science or policy choices made today. Now imagine law students, along with science and planning students, helping to facilitate those sessions, and you have some idea what a future-oriented approach to legal education may mean not just for students, but for the world.

It is personalized.

The Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law offers a uniquely personalized course of study. Our student-faculty ratio is extraordinary, particularly for a public institution, but we also have a great student-staff ratio. All of that translates into an institution that really cares for its students. Thus, you will not only have the opportunity to take small seminars and interact closely with faculty members, but you will also have easy access to staff to help address your needs outside of class. For example, we have created a new professional development training program, designed to prepare you, through
a combination of group classes and individual counseling, for the legal job market.

As you design your personalized academic agenda with our guidance, you will have an extraordinary wealth of possibilities. If you are interested in practice-oriented legal skills training, you will have ten different clinics to choose from, as well as opportunities to participate in moot court, legal externships, pro bono work, and other courses that focus on the practice side of being a lawyer. If you are interested in policy, you can work with professors who are helping to formulate solutions to the world's greatest challenges—fighting global warming; addressing the ethical issues raised by cutting-edge genomic medicine; reconceiving ideas of immigration, citizenship, and national boundaries; creating new standards for using scientific evidence; helping countries make transitions from repression to democracy; developing sustainable land use policies; and on and on. And finally, if you are interested in understanding law in its rich social, historical, scientific, and philosophical context, more than a third of our faculty have advanced degrees in fields other than law. Add in our world-class interdisciplinary programs in Law, Science, and Innovation and in Indian Law, and our new Center for Law and Global Affairs, and you have a rich set of opportunities ahead of you.

It is global.

No matter where and how you plan to practice law, it is clear that a properly educated lawyer today must be ready for transnational and international legal practice. The law school of the 21st century, and particularly a public one, must be embedded within the concentric circles of the communities in which it interacts. We must confront global problems and work to find solutions, whether that means convening policy summits; developing programs to work with industries, policy-makers, and nongovernmental organizations; training students to engage with social policy; or producing scholarship, congressional testimony, white papers and the like that demonstrate a clear commitment to engage in our world.

Law *can* confront global challenges. Law *can* help make the world safer and more just. Law *can* give voice to the voiceless. Law *can* help build the new rules and institutions that will allow an increasingly diverse and interconnected global population to live together in some semblance of peace. That is the forward-looking vision of law that we embrace and teach at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. The challenges of the 21st century await us; let's tackle them together.

--Dean Paul Schiff Berman