

Outcomes-Based Legal Education at William Mitchell College of Law

Spurred by anticipated changes in accreditation and new thinking about professional education, American legal education is undergoing dramatic transformation. Rather than focusing on educational inputs (what is taught by professors), legal educators are increasingly holding themselves and their students accountable for educational outputs (what is learned by students). Although at first blush this sounds like little more than a change in semantics, renewed attention to results, or outcomes, is profoundly reforming traditional legal education. This changing landscape provides William Mitchell with a unique opportunity to build on its historic strengths in the provision of practical legal education.

During the 2008-2009 academic year a faculty task force met to consider the implications of adopting explicit educational outcomes for graduates. The task force issued a report which was explored at a faculty retreat and was provided to the Board of Trustees in May, 2009. The report outlines a multi-year process for exploring and implementing an outcomes-based curricular approach.

The task force concluded that outcomes-based learning will enable William Mitchell to more concretely define and execute its vision and mission. For example, among other goals, the College seeks to instill in students the “practical wisdom” to put the law to work. But, what does practical wisdom mean and how do students know if they have acquired it? While Mitchell’s current program certainly provides opportunities for students to gain practical wisdom and experience, an outcomes-based curriculum would enhance this effort by: (1) articulating the core knowledge, skills, and professional attributes that constitute practical wisdom (outcomes); (2) aligning curriculum, teaching, and use of technology with desired outcomes; and (3) requiring demonstrated student proficiency with respect to outcomes at interim points in the curriculum and prior to graduation. Graduates might also demonstrate their competencies to potential employers through online portfolios which would contain writing samples, video-taped skills performances, and other demonstrations of learning.

An outcomes-based curricular approach will help the College to provide more immediate remediation for students who do not meet benchmarks, ensure student preparedness for practice; enhance relationships with alumni and employers, review faculty structure and evaluation, and provide ongoing data to assess the success of the College in fulfilling its mission.

During the 2009-2010 academic year the College’s curriculum committee will undertake two related initiatives. First, based on a set of curricular outcomes proposed by the task force, a curriculum mapping subcommittee will determine where the outcomes are currently taught and assessed. They will identify curriculum gaps, undesired repetition, and sequencing issues for the purpose of curriculum reform. Second, a writing outcomes subcommittee will focus on developing and preparing to implement College-wide writing outcomes. They will articulate writing-specific outcomes for graduates, identify evidence of proficiency, map where in the curriculum writing is taught and assessed, and develop a plan to determine the extent to which students currently achieve the outcomes.

MITCHELL

WILLIAM MITCHELL COLLEGE OF LAW

MISSION AND VISION

OUR VISION

To pioneer a demanding legal education so engaged with the profession that our graduates have an enduring advantage as they meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world.

OUR MISSION

We serve the law.

We teach it, study it, practice it, and work to make it just.

This is our mission.

Our students come to William Mitchell with diverse traits, talents, and experiences, yet they have in common a desire to transform themselves into skilled and ethical legal professionals.

They learn from us and from each other. We challenge and support them, and we are responsive to their family and career commitments. We study law and the legal profession as critical observers and active participants. Our legal education incorporates scholarship and practice, maintains a strong connection to the profession, is intellectually rigorous, and instills an ethic of service to clients and community.

Our students graduate with the **practical wisdom** to put the law to work.



WILLIAM MITCHELL
COLLEGE OF LAW

DRAFT Learning Outcomes¹

“Practical wisdom to put the law to work” means that:

Graduates have basic knowledge.

- Core subject matter (civil procedure, contracts, property, torts, constitutional law, comparative/international law)
- Legal systems, process, sources of law
- Interdisciplinary literacy

Graduates are proficient in the skills of analysis, research, communication, representation, work management, leadership, and self-reflection.

- Analysis & reasoning
- Legal & factual research
- Communication (listening, oral, written)
- Representation (creative problem-solving, strategic planning, counseling, negotiation, advocacy)
- Organization and management of work
- Leadership
- Self-reflection/ learn from experience

Graduates conduct themselves professionally and exercise judgment in use of knowledge and skills.

- Ethical conduct
- Reflection on personal values
- Performance of public service
- Promotion of justice

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¹ This is a preliminary list of learning outcomes for discussion purposes only. Outcomes should be measurable and be sufficiently flexible to accommodate different areas of practice and anticipate new professional roles.

