

2008 ABA ACADEMIC DEANS CONFERENCE
Strategic Change as Impacted by Bar Examiners

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What is the mission of your law school? Has the mission statement changed to reflect bar passage issues?

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We provide our mission statements as context for our presentations.

Vermont Law School is a private, independent law school and the only law school in the state of Vermont. The mission is:

To educate students in a diverse community that fosters personal growth and that enables them to attain outstanding professional skills and high ethical values with which to serve as lawyers and environmental and other professionals in an increasingly technological and interdependent global society.

The law school's mission statement is amplified by the following vision statement:

When an educational institution is identified by reference to a state, the identification generally connotes only the geographical location of the school or university. To the Vermont Law School community, however, our name defines more than a place; it defines the values of this unique educational family. Vermont, and the law school that bears its name, stress the importance of individuals in contrast to organizations. The lawyer who is known and respected in his or her community is still the norm and not the exception in Vermont, and Vermont Law School produces graduates with skills and values to fit that mold. For such lawyers, wherever their careers in the law may take them, the law remains a "calling" with ethical values that reflect the interpersonal relationships one still finds in Vermont's communities. Students and faculty at Vermont Law School relate to each other; they surmount the artificial barriers that divide so many educational communities. The ability of the Vermont Law School community to develop innovative programs, to respect our differences, to strive for individual achievement without destructive competition, to deal with major problems of our society while still remaining rooted in the beauty of this State – these are the qualities that draw students and faculty to the Vermont Law School. These are the qualities that give Vermont Law School its special character – a character that mirrors the wondrous state that is our home.

The law school has also adopted the following core values:

- (1) respect for and encouragement of the racial and cultural diversity of our community;
- (2) insistence on rigorous and intellectually demanding professional training;

- (3) respect for the natural environment of which our physical setting is a constant reminder;
- (4) consideration of the human scale of that setting; and
- (5) dedication to public responsibility.

North Carolina Central University School of Law is a state-funded law school. Its mission is:

The mission of the North Carolina Central University School of Law is to provide a challenging and broad-based educational program designed to stimulate intellectual inquiry of the highest order, and to foster in each student a deep sense of professional responsibility and personal integrity so as to produce competent and socially responsible members of the legal profession.

In achieving this mission, the Law School subscribes to the following joint statement of the American Bar Association, the Association of American Law Schools, and the Law School Admissions Council:

[A] student body that is diverse with respect to sex, ethnicity and race, and economic, educational and experiential backgrounds is essential to a quality legal education. Ours is a diverse society, and thus law students, before entering the legal profession, must obtain both a wide range of perspectives concerning the impact of law on various segments of our population, and a deeper understanding of law and justice in this increasingly complex society.

This statement is particularly poignant for a law school founded to educate African-Americans. In keeping with its historical role, an important aspect of the Law School's mission is to attract capable persons from diverse backgrounds who are committed to public service and to meeting the needs of people and communities that are underserved by or that are under-represented in the legal profession.

2. In focusing on bar passage issues, do law schools risk becoming “simply” bar preparation institutions and sacrificing a larger educational mission?

From a strategic planning perspective, how important is increasing the bar passage rate for your institution?

Does the administration (your Dean and the central University) agree with your assessment?

Do the students agree?

3. Has bar passage affected admissions policies or practices? In what way? Do you think this has been effective?

4. To what extent should bar passage issues control curriculum, pedagogy, and student assessment and evaluation?

Have you added courses to the required curriculum? Which ones?

Have you added bar preparation courses? Are they for credit or not? If for credit, are they graded or pass/fail?

Have faculty modified the coverage in courses? How?

Have faculty altered their pedagogy? How? Has it been effective?

Have faculty altered their assessment and evaluation? In what ways?

5. Has the bar passage issue affected academic success/support programming? How?
6. What program models have been effective in raising bar passage without sacrificing educational mission?

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