

Academic Assessment Plan

Juris Doctor

University of Arkansas School of Law

(Updated July 2017)

Program Goals

The Mission of the Law School was approved by the faculty as part of the Strategic Planning Process undertaken prior to the last sabbatical inspection by the ABA and AALS. As approved in 2010, the mission of the University of Arkansas School of Law is as follows:

The University of Arkansas School of Law is a nationally competitive, students-first learning community devoted to scholarly activity, to service, and to teaching the knowledge, skills, and core values needed for success in an increasingly diverse legal profession serving Arkansas and the world.

The curriculum and program of legal education at the School of Law has been developed and is continually being refined so that, even as the practice of law changes and the needs of new graduates evolve, we are accomplishing each of the following goals.

Ethics. Our graduates should demonstrate a fundamental understanding of the ethical responsibilities of an attorney as a client representative, officer of the court, and member of society. This requires our students to develop intellectual, work, and personal habits consistent with the ethical obligations of the legal profession; and to recognize, respect, and adhere to standards of appropriate professional conduct during their time at law school.

Understanding. Our graduates should demonstrate a fundamental understanding of the basic elements of substantive law, procedure, and legal theory. Our students are expected to access, comprehend, and use legal educational and research materials, sometimes on their own, sometimes in cooperation with their peers, and sometimes in class.

Communication. Communication, both oral and written, is one of the most important skills associated with being an effective lawyer. Therefore, our graduates should demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills in the context of predictive, persuasive, and prescriptive application of the law. Our students must be able to develop coherent legal arguments in support of a particular position, effectively communicate them in oral and written presentations, and participate in civil discourse of disputed issues.

Utilization. It is not enough to know the law; lawyers must also be able to use the law. Therefore, our graduates should demonstrate a reasonable array of legal practice skills, including the ability to conduct legal research, to engage in problem solving, to interact with clients, and to advocate on their behalf. Virtually all of our course work demands that students apply the law, rules, processes, values, and responsibilities of the legal profession in order to resolve various problems, and that they demonstrate an understanding of how to do so in the role of an advocate or counselor. This requires students to develop and assess alternate solutions. Many of our classes demand that students conduct legal research, identifying issues and logically approaching the need to find appropriate resources and authorities that might apply in each particular situation.

Professionalism. It is central to our mission that we train our students to be professionals. By this we mean that our graduates should demonstrate professionalism by conducting themselves in a professional manner, including by participating in opportunities to increase their professional knowledge and skills. Professional conduct includes the building blocks of professional success such as attending classes regularly and promptly, and complying with course requirements. It demands adherence to the school's code of student conduct. It also imposes on students the obligation to effectively manage time, including assigning appropriate priorities to tasks and commitments and completing work on time. Students are expected to assess their own educational needs to ensure that they maximize their time here, and that they not only learn but retain the rules, processes, values and skills generally regarded as necessary to effectively participate in the legal profession.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the faculty meeting held on September 26, 2016, the faculty voted to revise our programmatic outcomes to better reflect our intention to focus on the students= learning. The following are the five programmatic outcomes that our faculty has approved as goals for our program of legal education:

1. **Our graduates will have an understanding of their ethical responsibilities.** Graduates should demonstrate a fundamental understanding of the ethical responsibilities of an attorney as a client representative, officer of the court, and member of society.
2. **Our graduates will understand the law.** Graduates should demonstrate a fundamental understanding of the basic elements of substantive law, procedure, and legal theory.

3. **Our graduates will be able to communicate the law.** Graduates should demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills in the context of predictive, persuasive, and prescriptive application of the law.
4. **Our graduates will be able to use the law.** Graduates should demonstrate a reasonable array of legal practice skills, including the ability to conduct legal research, to engage in problem solving, to interact with clients, and to advocate on their behalf.
5. **Our graduates will be professionals.** Graduates should demonstrate professionalism by conducting themselves in a professional manner, including by participating in opportunities to increase their professional knowledge and skills.

Process for Assessing each Student Learning Outcome

1. Timeline for assessment and analysis

Programmatic learning outcomes will be assessed in a rotating cycle, with the focus on one outcome each year followed by a comprehensive review of all learning outcomes every 6th year. The cycle would then repeat.

2. Means of assessment and desired level of student achievement

The means for assessing each learning outcome will vary. However, the strategic planning committee and faculty as a whole will employ the following methods of determining student achievement levels:

- Review of course syllabi
- Surveys and interviews with faculty and students
- Student class performance
- Review of graduate performance on the Bar Exam.
- Evaluations by practicing lawyers who serve as judges for oral arguments and competitions
- Evaluations by site supervisors of student externs
- Employment data for graduates
- Reports from the Director of Academic Excellence and Bar Success

3. Reporting of results

The strategic planning committee will compile the results of its yearly review of one or more student learning outcomes and will report to the faculty and the dean by the end of the academic year. The yearly report will include recommendations for changes in response to perceived deficiencies.