From Law Technology News

Suffolk Law School Launches Law Technology Concentration
In addition to technology law, the concentration will help students learn project management and business skills.

By Victor Li
November 26, 2013

Andrew Perlman in class
Photo: Suffolk Law School

Students at Boston-based Suffolk University Law School now can sign up for a concentration in legal technology—a program that the school hopes will help graduates leave the campus better prepared for the changing legal industry.

Last week, Suffolk announced the creation of the new legal technology and innovation concentration for its Juris Doctorate students, citing the transformative effect of technology on the law, as well as the increased competition for legal employment. Students can start signing up for the program immediately. Other concentrations, which are open to second-year students, include civil litigation, intellectual property, business and financial services, health and biomedical, international, and labor and employment. The law school, according to its website, is more than 100 years old, and offers "three degree programs, several joint degree options, 18 areas of focus," and now, seven concentrations.

The unveiling of the program furthers Suffolk's embrace of technology and its effect on the legal industry. Professor Andrew Perlman, director of Suffolk Law's Institute on Law Practice Technology and Innovation says the new concentration isn't about playing with the latest toys and gadgets, but will focus on how technology has changed, and continues to change, the way lawyers practice. (Perlman, by the way, is an early adopter of Google Glass which he uses in his law school classes.)
"This concentration will help students understand changes in legal marketplace itself," says Perlman. "The delivery of legal service has become much different over the last few years," he said. "Clients are demanding more efficiency," he noted.

The concentration—which includes a mix of previously-offered and new courses—has a decided business flavor, with several classes taken from the school's Masters in Business Administration curriculum. Participants will take four required courses, addressing project management, the legal profession, and a course that examines practical and ethical issues relating to the use of sophisticated software for lawyers.

Electives will include a slew of business-related classes that will be offered in conjunction with Suffolk's Sawyer Business School—such as accounting, writing business plans and private equity financing. Other electives will include e-discovery law, internet law, and an IP entrepreneurship clinic where students will perform pro bono representation of companies and individuals. Students are required to complete an internship.

Perlman says lawyers must learn business skills to excel in today's legal environment. "As I talk to lawyers, law firms and legal services organizations, they all think that business skills are an increasingly important skill set." Perlman noted that the required project management class is taught by Catherine Alman MacDonagh, co-founder of the Legal Lean Sigma Institute and a Six Sigma green belt.

Perlman also acknowledged that helping students boost their chances for employment was also an important factor behind the creation of the concentration. "We want to prepare our students as effectively as possible for the job market," he says. "This skill set will help them with traditional law firm jobs, but also with other jobs in the legal industry. Meanwhile, smaller firms, for instance, are looking for 'two-for-ones'—lawyers who can practice law but have skills like marketing, project management or IT." Perlman also pointed to e-discovery and legal process outsourcing companies as other potential places where graduates could land.

Jack Zaloudek, program director for Washington University's cybersecurity management program that debuted last August, applauded Suffolk's addition of a project management course to its law technology concentration. "The emphasis on project management is a great addition," he says. "As law firms evolve from charging by the hour, to charging by the case or project, having project management education in the PMBOK [Project Management Body of Knowledge, published by the Project Management Institute] as it relates to law is huge." Zaloudek did express disappointment that the program did not include a cybersecurity component.

Deborah Ginsberg, educational technology librarian at IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law Library, says the concentration seems like an interesting idea. "I think law schools should be willing to try new programs to address student needs and interests," she says. "We're seeing more of these kinds of programs now, which is good for law students and law schools."

William Henderson, a litigation partner at Quarles & Brady, also praised Suffolk for its forward thinking. "In our information saturation era, law graduates must be able to deploy new skills to be
successful and employable," said Henderson. "Law students desperately need to emerge from law school with new project, entrepreneurial, and data management competencies in addition to the traditional research, writing, and analysis skills. One recent law graduate with excellent e-discovery skills working with readily available software is worth rooms full of associates wading manually through documents." Henderson also warned that law schools that fail to adapt to the new legal services paradigm will "perish like dinosaurs floundering in a new ecosystem."

Suffolk is not alone in addressing these issues. Law schools, faced with declining enrollments, are starting to experiment. In the last month, several law schools have created tech-centered programs to train students in technology, albeit from the business side.

• On Nov. 13, Albany Law School announced a partnership with the State University of New York College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering to create a program that helps students assist technology startups.
• One day later, Brooklyn Law School unveiled the Center for Urban Business Entrepreneurship, a similar program designed to prepare law students to assist technology startups and new businesses.
• The University of Pennsylvania Law School announced the creation of a joint law and engineering degree in August that will go into effect in 2014. Students in the joint-degree program will study e-discovery, privacy, cyber security and other tech areas.

"I know not all of these new programs will work," says Ginsberg. "But law schools are in a great position to experiment with new ideas and technologies. I’d like to see more of law schools try new ideas."

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