



UNIVERSITY *of*  
DENVER

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STURM COLLEGE OF LAW

## 2015 Strategic Plan Executive Summary

### OUR VALUES

We are committed to:

- Encouraging innovative and effective teaching;
- Creating, disseminating, and applying knowledge through scholarship;
- Contributing to a just society;
- Fostering inclusiveness and respect;
- Improving the legal system;
- Building and maintaining strong connections with the legal community; and
- Promoting productive involvement with the University and the broader community.

### OUR VISION

The University of Denver Sturm College of Law will play a leadership role in advancing the future of legal education by:

- **Creating bridges to meaningful careers.** We will educate graduates who will be excellent practice-ready professionals: knowledgeable, innovative, thoughtful, practical, hard-working, ethical, and well-prepared for the practice of law.
- **Building strong connections to our community.** We will engage with our community, our alumni, and the University at all levels of our work to create value for our students and value for the community.
- **Cultivating ideas that change the world for the better.** We will create and disseminate scholarly knowledge in a variety of forms in order to solve social and legal problems and to promote justice throughout the world.

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS AND INITIATIVES

We will achieve our vision and increase our competitiveness through three strategic goals and eight initiatives that support these goals.

- I. **Strategic Goal: Practice-Readiness and Professional Empowerment.** Denver Law will prepare its students to make an immediate positive impact on their clients and communities by the day they graduate. This is practice-readiness. We will also empower our students to discover and achieve their career goals.

We will prepare our students to be practice-ready and professionally empowered through innovative curriculum and student-centered support, set out in four initiatives:

- **The Modern Learning Initiative (Integrated and Experiential Education)**

We will help our students become practice ready by offering a curriculum that *integrates the three Carnegie apprenticeships*: (1) legal analysis, (2) practical skills, and (3) the development of professional identity. We will offer a large selection of courses in which students are exposed to two, or even all three, of these apprenticeships.

One of the best ways to train practice-ready lawyers is through *problem-based experiential learning*. We will offer our students a broad range of experiential learning opportunities, including clinics, externships, and course simulations, as well as other innovative, project-based, hands-on courses and course components.

We will continue to offer our students three signature curricular options:

- The Experiential Advantage™: Every Denver Law student can participate in 30 credits of experiential learning courses—a full year of experiential learning during the course of their law school career.
- The Live Client Guarantee™: Every student can take a clinic or externship during his or her time at Denver Law.
- Carnegie Integrated Courses, which combine all three of the Carnegie apprenticeships, and provide opportunities for both written and oral advocacy.

Additionally, we will:

- Expand our integrated and experiential offerings.

- Explore new and innovative ways to:
  - Incorporate practical skills and professional identity development into the curriculum.
  - Provide live-client opportunities for our students in a cost-effective manner.
  - Incorporate experiential components into more traditional courses.

Our curriculum will not only result in practice-ready and professionally-empowered graduates, but will be noticed and emulated by other law schools across the country and noticed and respected in the practice community.

○ **The Specialization Initiative – Part A (Certificate Programs for Students)**

By offering our students clusters of courses in specialized subject-matter areas, we will provide them with deep subject matter understanding. We will then award them certificates that demonstrate that mastery to potential employers.

We currently offer certificates in:

- Business and Commercial Law
- Constitutional Rights and Remedies
- Environmental and Natural Resources Law
- Intellectual Property Law
- International Law
- Workplace Law

Additionally, we offer opportunities for even deeper specialization for our JD students through dual degree options with three of our Master's in Law (LLM) programs. Our current dual JD/LLM programs include:

- Environmental and Natural Resources Law
- International Business Transactions
- Tax Law

We will respond to needs for specialization that arise from growth markets in the legal economy, adding and removing areas of specialization as the market changes. Based on the feedback we have received on areas of predicted high job growth, we will consider potential course clusters and certificate programs in:

- Compliance
- Energy Law
- Family Law
- Health Care Law and/or Elder Law
- Immigration Law
- Marijuana Law and Policy

We will, of course, remain committed to also providing an excellent general legal education.

○ **The Interdisciplinary Initiative (Problem-Solvers for the New Economy)**

Lawyers are problem-solvers and legal education should encourage students to examine the complex contexts in which legal problems arise. Lawyers must also understand their clients' non-legal challenges.

At the same time, the shape of knowledge in our society is changing, and silos between discipline-specific approaches seem to be breaking down. Thus, courses of study that incorporate information from other disciplines can be particularly effective at teaching problem-solving and helping our graduates compete for jobs.

Denver Law will leverage the fact that it is part of an excellent university, with many excellent educational programs, to help provide interdisciplinary context to our law students. Accordingly, we will empower our students to:

- Take classes, certificates, or degrees at other units on campus that will enhance their abilities and their marketability;
- Complete formal joint degree programs and joint certificate programs with other University units; and

We will also partner with other units to develop courses that combine learning—as well as students and faculty—from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Where possible, these courses will incorporate problem-based experiential learning.

Denver Law will lead the creation of relevant and sought-after legal education products that leverage the assets and talents of multiple DU units.

○ **The Career Development Initiative (Navigating Curriculum and Career)**

We will empower students to navigate curricular and career choices, and help them discover and achieve their career goals and develop their professional identities. We will do so through integrated, coordinated, and embedded academic and career advising, financial counseling, and mentoring, beginning in the 1L year.

We will differentiate Denver Law from its competitor schools by:

- Creating more integration and coordination among our student resources, including curricular advising, mentoring, and career services.

- Developing tools—including customized career maps and dashboards—to help students navigate the choices available to them and to track their progress toward their goals.

II. **Strategic Goal: Connecting with the Legal Community.** Denver Law will continue to connect with our legal community to provide excellent education for our students and to be an indispensable part of the community, providing pathways for students, talent for employers and clients, and knowledge to help solve the key problems of our time.

We are Denver’s law school. The Denver legal community looks to us for talent and thought leadership, and partners with us to provide a first-rate education for our students.

And we make Denver lawyers. We differentiate ourselves by providing our students with a strong pipeline into this vibrant and exciting practice community.

We will continue to build and nurture our relationship with the Denver legal community through two initiatives:

○ **The Partnership in Education Initiative (Educating our Students Together)**

Our community partners are essential to our ability to create practice-ready graduates. These partners serve our students as mentors, externship supervisors, and adjunct professors. They help our students build bridges into the community.

We will continue to reach out to, and partner with, our legal community to ensure our graduates are practice-ready and professionally empowered.

○ **The Value to Community Initiative (Giving Back to our Community)**

We will strive to be an indispensable part of our community. The Partnership in Education Initiative should be a two-way street, valuable both to our students and our community partners. Additionally, by serving and giving back to our community, we teach and model the importance of public service in our profession. We will serve our community in a number of ways, including:

- Supplying excellent legal talent for employers and clients through our practice-readiness initiatives.
- Providing relevant and high-quality education and professional development opportunities to the members of the community, including CLE and other professional education programs, advanced certificate and degree options (such as LLM and Master’s programs), and other forms of unbundled legal education. Additionally, we will regularly invite community members to participate in programs and events at our school.
- Our faculty will continue to participate in the intellectual and professional life of the community, and to engage with community leaders to help

address important legal and policy issues. As part of our High-Impact Scholarship Initiatives, discussed below, we will create and disseminate knowledge that contributes to solutions.

- Our students and faculty will continue to serve the public interest through pro bono and public service work, fostering an ethic of service in our students while helping them build practice-readiness.

**III. Strategic Goal: High-Impact Scholarship.** Denver Law will create and disseminate high-quality scholarship that makes significant contributions to legal and social policy debates and promotes justice.

Over the past five years, Denver Law’s scholarly output has nearly doubled. Our scholarship has impacted many major debates of our time. This, along with the innovative improvements in our curriculum, has elevated the school’s profile and advanced its reputation as a leader in legal education.

We will build upon and expand our scholarly impact through three initiatives:

- **The Productivity Initiative (Mentoring and Incentive Structures)**

We commit to expanding the breadth of our scholarly engagement and exploring new and innovative ways to facilitate scholarship among our faculty, particularly through mentoring and thoughtful incentive structures.

- **The Impact Initiative (Producing Work that Changes the World)**

One of Denver Law’s greatest strengths is our ability to create scholarship that changes the world. We commit to demonstrating the value of our scholarship, both in terms of its impact on legal and social policy, and in terms of its benefits to our students.

Our scholarship will provide value to our community, and will be routinely cited and relied upon by:

- Other scholars, advancing important debates and inquiries;
- Courts, advocates, and legal advisors;
- Policy makers; and
- The media.

Scholarship has impact when it reaches a wide audience, and particularly an audience that uses it to take action on legal or social issues. We will continue to increase the impact of our scholarship by seeking ever-wider audiences and by building our reputation as a place where great ideas are cultivated.

○ **The Specialization Initiative – Part B (Supporting Scholarly Impact)**

Our scholarly productivity and the impact of our scholarship will be enhanced by creating clusters of faculty members in subject matter areas where we have or can build strength. These clusters support faculty scholarship in those areas, and also support programing for the academic and practice communities. This, in turn, serves to enhance our reputation in these areas.

Our five Centers of Excellence are:

- Constitutional Rights and Remedies
- Corporate and Commercial Law
- Environmental and Natural Resources Law
- International Law
- Workplace Law

We will continue to promote and support these Centers of Excellence as a way to leverage the synergies and strengths of specialization. At the same time, we will continue to monitor the effectiveness and relevance of each Center, and promote scholarly collaboration outside, as well as inside, of the Centers.

Additionally, as discussed above, in connection with our goal of creating practice-ready graduates, we will provide opportunities for our students to specialize in areas that are independent from these Centers of Excellence (Part A of our Specialization Initiative).

## **OUR ONGOING COMMITMENTS**

Across all of our goals and initiatives, we remain committed to:

- **Diversity and Inclusive Excellence**

Practice-readiness depends upon our graduates' cultural competence—their ability to serve diverse clients and communities and to value a diversity of perspectives to solve legal problems and address larger social issues in society.

We remain committed to diversity in our student body, faculty, and staff, and to embedding inclusive excellence in our curriculum and our law school community.

- **Globalization**

Being practice-ready includes preparation to work in an interconnected and global society. Aspects of international law and custom are interwoven across legal practice specialty areas. In today's world, most practice areas involve global issues.

We remain committed to curriculum and experiences that bring globalization issues or, where relevant, international law, into courses and certificates, as appropriate.

- **Unbundled Legal Education**

Fundamentally, law schools offer legal education. Traditionally, however, they have offered only one product: the Doctor of Jurisprudence (“JD”). While this degree is the best option for many people seeking legal education, increasingly, members of our local, national, and international communities are looking for other legal educational products.

We remain committed to providing excellent options for non-JD students seeking legal education to advance their career goals. We will continue to improve our current LLM and Master’s offerings and will consider additional degree and certificate options and courses to meet the needs for legal education beyond the JD program.

- **Bar Passage**

We recognize that, for our many students who seek to practice law, bar passage is an essential part of practice-readiness. Additionally, bar pass results are an important success measure for law schools and for students.

We remain committed to a curriculum and bar passage programs that will maintain or improve current bar passage rates.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT**

Strategic plans, like this one we have adopted, are not self-executing. We will therefore develop an implementation plan to ensure that this strategic plan becomes a reality. The implementation plan will include specific goals and timetables, and specific allocations of responsibility for accomplishing those goals. It will also include measures for determining progress toward those goals and for success.