

The Strategic Plan Should Address Law School Culture

by Will Pasley, '13

On September 10th, the Hastings Board of Directors consented to the implementation of Hastings' first Strategic Plan. This dramatic overhaul of Hastings has been in the works for over a year and represents our school's response to the changing legal education and law industries. The Strategic Plan aims to revitalize Hastings with a new focus on students and the school community. Here are some of the student-related highlights:

Student services will have a central point to go to so that students do not have to navigate the labyrinth of departments when having problems.

Enrollment will be significantly reduced and faculty will have a larger workload of advising and college governance. Other degree programs will also be offered.

Some lecture-hall style classrooms will need to be reconfigured in order to accommodate the new emphasis on team-based, practical, and project-based classes.

The plan recognizes that tuition cannot keep increasing. Students have pretty much reached their limit for debt, and the prospect of being saddled with \$125k+ in debt will hurt student achievement and health.

The pedagogy and curriculum will undergo a thorough review with an emphasis on practical learning, a supportive learning environment and ethics throughout the entire law school experience. Indeed, it has even been suggested that the faculty model professionalism by treating students like they would want clients to be treated.

Overall, I was very impressed by the Strategic Plan presentation at the board meeting (you can read the powerpoint from the presentation on the Strategic Planning website). I am usually

critical of policy promulgated by school administrations, but I was frankly astounded at how much of the plan I agreed with. Let's hope the implementation can stay true to the tone and ideals the Strategic Plan has laid out. I foresee the implementation being rocky because the plan did not directly address the need to change the culture of law school. Students have historically resisted law school reforms, perceiving them as too risky because they force us to stray from the conventional path to lawyer-hood. If the administration cannot get students on their side, the plan will fail.

To address the impact of the culture of law school on the plan, a few things need to happen. **One:** students need to become more involved in the implementation of the plan. This will not only generate a feeling of ownership over the plan, but develop long-lasting bonds between the students involved and Hastings. The

administration needs to carve out places for this involvement to occur, both in their implementation process and in our schedules (such as by offering credit for involvement, which will build student problem-solving abilities and practical skills with navigating bureaucracy and regulations). **Two:** student motivation needs to be learning-based and not grade-based. A complete overhaul of the grading system is necessary to change law school culture.

Three: the faculty need to develop a deliberate approach to building student identity. This was hinted at in the Strategic Plan's emphasis on training in ethics and professionalism, but it needs to be more directly addressed. I would like to see the faculty draft a statement on what they think a lawyer is, what a lawyer values, how a lawyer thinks and how a lawyer behaves, followed by a detailed explanation of how they intend to instruct students on how

to be a lawyer. Currently, there is an emphasis on "thinking like a lawyer," but there doesn't seem to be a unified vision of what skills students should take away from law school. I have found that it tends to vary from class to class, some professors emphasize emotionless logic, some emphasize problem-solving, while others emphasize winning. A deliberate approach to identity formation would focus the faculty's abilities on producing professional, thoughtful and ethical lawyers, a primary goal of the Strategic Plan. Having this articulated goal would seriously ease student anxiety and dissolve much of the resistance to the Strategic Plan reforms.

Despite my concerns about implementation, I am excited by the Strategic Plan. I am very glad our college is willing to put students first, and I believe this plan represents a step a toward a more effective and humane law school.

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