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# Washington and Lee University School of Law



WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

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### A Message from the Dean

The Washington and Lee University School of Law is embarking on a dramatic revision of its law school curriculum, entirely reinventing the third year to make it a year of professional development through simulated and actual practice experiences.



This is one of the boldest reforms in American legal education since Dean Christopher Columbus Langdell pioneered the new curriculum at Harvard Law School in the late 19th century. For the next 100 years, American law schools largely followed the Harvard model, and in many respects it has worked remarkably well.



**Dean Rod Smolla**

We are at a turning point in the history of the legal profession and the history of legal education. As the Carnegie Foundation's influential 2007 report, "Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law," forcefully explained, while the Langdell model works extremely well in the first year to teach students the essential building blocks of legal theory, reasoning, and doctrine, it is an incomplete vision of what it should mean to prepare a lawyer for the profession.

There is a need to be met in our service to the public and the profession. Many law schools from across the spectrum of legal education are responding to these forces with innovations and reforms. Five years from now, legal education will have changed. At Washington and Lee, we are proud to be a leader in this national movement. We believe it is incumbent on our Law School to be more ambitious in our mission and innovative in our approach to education.

As Chief Justice Marshall chided in *McCulloch v. Maryland*, "We must never forget that it is *a constitution* we are expounding." For our purposes now, let us never forget that it is *a curriculum* we are expounding, a curriculum for professional legal education—an education that should meet the evolving needs of the public, the profession, and the international rule of law.

The materials that follow describe this new, exciting third-year curriculum. It is a creative blend of intellectually rigorous study of legal theory and doctrine—the traditional focus of law schools in the United States—with the development of professional identity, ethical sensibilities, problem-solving, and the exercise of judgment in action. In the wisdom of a Chinese proverb: "Tell me, I will forget. Show me, I will remember. Involve me, I will understand."

Our purpose is to transform law school into a three-year progression from the purely academic study of law to the development of the lawyer's professional role as counselor and advocate in the highest ethical traditions of the profession.

--Rod Smolla

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