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New Conn. Law School In Works

UNH sees a 'good fit' with undergraduate programs

By DOUGLAS S. MALAN

The University of New Haven is moving forward with plans for a new law school, setting its sights on 2013 for its first class.

An eight-month feasibility study has been completed and the results will be presented to the private university's board of governors on Thursday. The law school will seek accreditation from the American Bar Association.

University President Steven H. Kaplan said the study "shows what we believed, that there is still a great deal of demand for a law school in Connecticut."

Kaplan said there's specifically a demand for more specialized education in law schools, and that's where UNH, which is actually in West Haven, can make its impact. For example, officials envision graduates from the university's Tagliatela College of Engineering wanting background in patent and intellectual property law as they move into their professional careers.

Likewise, the college sees graduates of the Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences desiring in-depth study of criminal law.

Pairing a law school with these programs is "a good fit," Kaplan said. Recent engineering school graduates who obtained law degrees elsewhere told Kaplan that a law school option at UNH would have been attractive to them.

"I would envision students going to the law school for the intellectual and analytical skills that pertain to the law and then using their J.D.s in areas other than practicing law," Kaplan said. Each year, approximately 40 UNH graduates go on to law school.

If created, UNH would be the fourth law school in the state, and the third in the New Haven area. The others are Quinnipiac School of Law in Hamden and Yale Law School in downtown New Haven. The University of Connecticut School of Law in Hartford is the state's only public law school.

There is talk of market saturation, not just in Connecticut but the Northeast in general. Including UNH, there are six law school plans on the drawing board in this part of the country. "This is beyond absurd," said William Henderson, a professor at Indiana University School of Law, who focuses on the legal job market.

The proposals come at a time when law school applications nationwide are declining. The number of people applying to the 198 ABA-accredited law schools and the nine provisionally accredited schools dropped for the fourth year in a row, according to the Law School Admission Council.

Preliminary figures for this autumn show a 1 percent decline in the number of applicants, while the number of overall applications increased by 2.7 percent. The figures indicate that while fewer people are applying to law school, they are submitting more applications.

The American Bar Association cannot limit the number of law schools that seek or obtain accreditation because of restraint of trade issues. In addition, the accreditation process does not specifically require law schools to demonstrate that their students can find employment after graduation.

Start-Up Capital

Nationally, some educators have issued cautions to colleges planning new law schools. They warn that a start-up program can cost up to \$50 million, and that it's hard to recoup the investment because of high operating costs that include faculty salaries and additional admissions officers.

Kaplan said UNH projects that it would need start-up capital of \$20 million, and that the university is "talking to major donors right now." The feasibility study revealed that a surplus in the university's operating budget could cover the first three years of operating expenses, Kaplan



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University of New Haven President Steven H. Kaplan said a law school feasibility study will be presented to the school's board of governors on June 12.

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said.

The school also is searching for 100,000 square feet of physical space for the law school, which could come from rehabbing an existing building.

UNH first considered a law school shortly after Quinnipiac absorbed the University of Bridgeport's law school in the 1990s. Many faculty members believed UNH should have made a stronger push to obtain that law school, Kaplan said.

Quinnipiac School of Law Dean Brad Saxton declined comment on the proposal for a new law school just 15 miles from his campus. But other sources say that UNH may be able to take advantage of a decision by Quinnipiac to decrease the size of its law school classes and focus on students who score highest on the LSATs.

The idea is that the better students will find jobs at bigger law firms, which in turn would enhance the school's position in the influential *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. In this year's national rankings of law schools, Yale was No. 1 and UConn was 46th. Quinnipiac was considered a third-tier school, ranking outside the top 100.

Meanwhile, deans at Yale and UConn said the more law schools the merrier.

Yale Law School Dean Harold Hongju Koh is a New Haven native who spent his childhood watching baseball games at UNH. "I admire the way the university has grown and developed," he said. Though he was unaware of UNH's proposal for a law school, "I'd be the last guy to discourage it."

Koh added that a new law school would provide additional opportunities for Yale Law School graduates who are interested in teaching.

UConn School of Law Dean Jeremy Paul said his school is "very supportive" of UNH's endeavors. "We would welcome any university that works to put together a quality program," he said.

This story includes reporting from The National Law Journal, sister publication of the Connecticut Law Tribune.•



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