

City University of New York School of Law

**A Time of Change:
Public Interest Education for an Evolving Legal Profession**

A Five-Year Strategic Plan (2015–2020)

Law in the Service of Human Needs

A TIME OF CHANGE

This document is the capstone of a shared process to advance CUNY School of Law over the next five years, in a profession that is experiencing unprecedented changes.

Our core principles are unwavering. Since 1983, we have trained lawyers to serve the underprivileged and disempowered and to make a difference in their communities – locally, nationally, and globally. Our mission is to graduate outstanding public interest attorneys and to enhance the diversity of the legal profession. This provides the foundation for our five-year strategic plan, as well as a map to help us traverse the indeterminate terrain ahead.

We have used our strategic planning process to understand the changes and uncertainties we face and to respond affirmatively to them. How can we enhance our educational offerings to better prepare our students to succeed as public justice attorneys? How can we enhance experiential learning opportunities throughout the curriculum so that our students have even more real-world experience before graduation? The seven imperatives and related goals outlined in the following strategic plan will help us focus over the next five years on those initiatives that will enable us to excel.

Our strategic plan will not linger on a shelf. We will keep it in our sights. I have tasked the Strategic Planning Committee with reviewing the plan regularly during the academic year and reporting to the faculty and administration on how we are carrying out the plan every semester. The strategic plan is also not a stagnant document. On an annual basis, we will deliberate on whether we need to revise or enhance the goals we have designed to carry out our strategic imperatives.

Students come to study at CUNY School of Law because they want to change the world for the better. A nimble institution, guided by an enduring mission and a responsive set of strategic imperatives, will help us make their dreams a reality.



Michelle J. Anderson
Dean and Professor of Law

OUR MISSION

The mission of the City University of New York School of Law is to educate, develop, and help sustain outstanding lawyers and community leaders. Through an innovative, student-centered curriculum, we prepare students for diverse careers in law that focus on social justice, public service, and public interest practice. We are committed to increasing access to legal education and enhancing the diversity of the legal profession. Our motto, “Law in the Service of Human Needs,” infuses everything we do.

OUR VISION

We envision a world in which a diverse community of passionate attorneys uses the law as a tool for social justice locally, nationally, and globally, and law schools provide practical, ethical, and accessible education.

OUR VALUES

We embrace:

- An innovative, student-centered approach to teaching.
- The power of public service and public interest law to enhance equality and social justice.
- The multitude of ways that lawyering can serve communities in need.
- The richness of thought and experience that emerges from teaching and learning in an extraordinarily diverse community.
- The responsibilities that law schools have to provide both access to justice and access to the legal profession itself, especially within underserved communities.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

We approached the strategic planning process grounded in a deep commitment to our students, social justice, public service, and a more diverse legal profession.

This document is the culmination of a collaborative and inclusive process that sought input and feedback from a diverse cross-section of the community: students, alumni, faculty, staff, and donors. They ensured that our future reflects the priorities identified as important by those who know us best. Utilizing surveys, focus groups, and retreats, we launched an internal and external assessment to consider our strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities. We reviewed hundreds of pages of materials offering insight on the most pressing issues facing legal educators and the profession. We received thousands of ideas, big and small, and heard many opinions on where we should focus our efforts during the next five years.

There was unanimity in one concept: that our dual mission of increased access to the profession and social justice remains as important today as it did 31 years ago at the law school’s founding. While legal education may be undergoing rapid change, the law school’s focus on teaching, learning, and preparing our students to be excellent practitioners continues to guide our efforts to be a model law school for the 21st century. We share a commitment to educating future lawyers who share our passion for righting wrongs and for using the law as a tool for positive social change.

We will continue to distinguish CUNY Law from other law schools by our commitment to preparing students for practice in the public interest, requiring that all students get to participate in a clinical program, integrating lawyering skills throughout the curriculum, and the critical perspective and client-centered approach that permeates our courses. We bring together the very best in clinical training with innovative approaches to doctrinal legal education to create lawyers prepared to transform the profession and address inequality locally, nationally, and internationally.

This plan builds upon our achievements in clinical programs, curricular innovation, and diversity, using our mission to provide a durable framework for success. What follows are seven strategic imperatives and goals to achieve them that will guide our planning and thinking for the next five years.

Strategic Imperative I: Innovate our curriculum and academic programs to reflect the changing legal environment and advance our mission.

CUNY School of Law remains committed to providing a progressive and practical legal education for those who wish to serve communities in need. We continue to emphasize ethical professionalism and cross-cultural competence to ensure our students serve all their clients effectively.

We must diversify our programs to continue to make law school accessible to as many social justice-oriented students as possible. We will increase opportunities for experiential learning, offer clinics and concentrations that reflect community needs, and maximize career opportunities for our graduates, all while keeping our program affordable and maximizing flexibility for our students.

Goal 1. Diversify our programs to make legal education more accessible.

- Launch a part-time *Juris Doctor* program.
- Explore opportunities to expand the type of legal education the law school provides (*e.g.*, joint and dual degree programs, certification programs, two-year masters in law program, programs for foreign lawyers sitting for the bar).
- Explore opportunities for partnerships with law schools in other countries.

Goal 2. Diversify and strengthen course offerings.

- Enhance choices and course offerings throughout the curriculum.
- Expand litigation and trial skills instruction in non-clinical courses.
- Expand international offerings and integrate international perspectives in other courses to prepare students to practice in an increasingly global environment.
- Develop a “digital literacy for lawyers” curriculum.

Goal 3. Increase experiential learning opportunities throughout the curriculum.

- Strengthen the connections between clinics and non-clinical courses.
- Integrate practice skills and opportunities for clinical involvement earlier in the law school curriculum.
- Increase partnerships and connections with community groups to develop experiential opportunities in the field.
- Consider career opportunities and practice-focused legal skills when establishing new classes.

Goal 4. Increase flexibility within the academic program.

- Increase opportunities for students to receive credit for faculty-supervised internships.
- Reduce the credits required for graduation.
- Increase schedule flexibility for students to allow them to balance school with other demands.

Strategic Imperative II: Strengthen our scholarship and teaching to advance our mission to prepare students for public interest practice and diversify the legal profession.

The CUNY Law faculty is a diverse group of public interest teachers, practitioners, and scholars known for innovative approaches to teaching and collaborative engagement with students, colleagues, and the larger justice community. Their practical experience adds depth to the classroom and informs their research and scholarship. As both teachers and scholars, they strive to integrate theory, doctrine, and practice throughout their work.

In the coming years, we will strengthen our capacity to promote faculty pedagogy and curricular innovation, community and professional activities, and scholarship, so that we may continue to influence practitioners, the judiciary, the academy, legislative bodies, as well as the broader community of decision-makers. We will also provide more opportunities for faculty to deepen their expertise through training and technological support to better prepare our students for 21st-century lawyering.

Goal 1. Advance the law school as a place of academic, curricular, and pedagogical innovation.

- Support faculty research and scholarship that engage with critical legal reform issues and advocacy.
- Increase training and support for teaching innovations and faculty teaching expertise.
- Conduct and disseminate research on the law school's curriculum, academic innovations, and expertise.
- Increase support for conferences and include the importance of pedagogy in non-pedagogical conferences.
- Launch the Sorensen Center for International Peace and Justice to advance the law school as a place of academic and social justice innovation.
- Develop new structures (*e.g.*, institutes, centers, projects, initiatives) to expand our institutional thought leadership, research, and influence on key public policy and social justice issues.

Goal 2. Expand faculty use of technology in teaching.

- Assist faculty in using technology in their teaching (*e.g.*, hybrid classes, electronic classrooms, e-portfolios, online CLEs).
- Incorporate technological advances in the practice of law in our teaching (*e.g.*, e-discovery, application- and tablet-based practice, case management systems).
- Increase courtroom technology capability and teaching, including a dedicated trial courtroom with state-of-the-art technology.

Strategic Imperative III: Create opportunities for our students to excel as public justice attorneys.

Our goal is to provide support for our students even after they graduate. We will create a stronger career support network that addresses the needs of our students and alumni at every phase of their careers. We will strengthen our intensive skills training, which is a hallmark of our educational model, and expand access through the use of online platforms to deliver content.

We will also strengthen our three-pronged approach to career planning – mentoring by alumni and faculty, counseling on the best strategies and skills for obtaining a job, and increasing the number of internships and fellowships available to students – to give students the experience that will help them to succeed in securing employment.

Goal 1. Enhance our career development program.

- Educate students about the full range of career opportunities (including alternatives to traditional legal jobs) here and abroad.
- Increase career planning outreach to students and alumni throughout their legal careers.
- Develop a robust faculty and alumni mentorship program.
- Increase the number of summer internship and fellowship opportunities for students.
- Help students manage their debt through affordable tuition and loan forgiveness programs.

Goal 2. Increase academic support for students.

- Strengthen our academic skills program.
- Implement an integrated, online student support network.
- Provide for alternative assessment models.
- Evaluate and enhance our academic standing policy.
- Evaluate the impact of class size, number of classes, and credit allocations on student success.

Goal 3. Strengthen bar support.

- Strengthen support for students to pass the New York State Bar Examination.
- Maintain a bar passage rate that meets or exceeds the state average.
- Expand bar examination testing methods in coursework.

Strategic Imperative IV: Enhance opportunities for lifelong engagement and community interaction.

We welcome individuals into our “community of justice” not just for three years, but throughout their professional lives. In the coming years, we will strengthen our commitment to the professional development of our alumni through opportunities for formal and informal education, networking, mentoring, and involvement in the school’s ongoing social justice initiatives.

With our new location in Long Island City, we have greater opportunity to engage with the larger community of individuals who shares our passion for “law in the service of human needs,” and will develop public programming that attracts a wide audience.

Goal 1. Enhance or create new programming that engages alumni throughout their professional lives.

- Reevaluate the initiatives that currently comprise our Community Legal Resource Network, and modify, expand, and replace, as necessary, to meet the demands of 21st-century approaches to lawyering and social justice.
- Introduce a robust, curriculum-driven, professional development program (incorporating continuing legal education) that provides outstanding post-graduate education for alumni and other professionals.
- Identify and expand opportunities for alumni to interact in the life of the school, including Alumni Weekend, Public Square programming, regional events, mentoring, and an online community.

Goal 2. Enhance visibility in – and interaction with – the broader community.

- Complete an overhaul of our digital ecosystem – multiple websites, social media channels, and electronic communications – to better present ourselves to numerous constituencies.
- More fully integrate print and electronic communications to increase the amount of content in service of the school’s mission.
- Build upon the recently inaugurated Public Square Live series of public programming by presenting the ideas of a diverse group of writers, educators, activists, lawyers, and artists.
- Initiate a coordinated public relations campaign that focuses on faculty, student, and alumni impact and serves to build community.

Strategic Imperative V: Diversify our funding sources to accomplish strategic goals and support students.

State support and tuition revenue cover the costs of delivering the school's core J.D. program. In order to enhance the basic educational experience for our students, award students scholarships and fellowships, create social justice initiatives that reflect our unique mission, and secure our long-term financial stability, we must make strategic investments in philanthropic development, communications, and alumni relations.

Over the next five years, we will increase philanthropic contributions for current-use and endowment purposes. We will further develop our volunteer structures, refine our communications strategies about the work of the law school, and employ best practices throughout our institutional advancement efforts.

Goal 1. Increase philanthropic and public support.

- Prepare the school for a major endowment fundraising campaign that will provide financial stability for summer fellowships, scholarships, endowed professorships, the Pipeline to Justice program, bar support program, and other important needs.
- Enhance annual giving strategies to increase participation by alumni and the general philanthropic community.
- Expand the roles of our Board of Visitors and the Board of Directors of the CUNY School of Law Foundation as robust fundraising partners.

Goal 2. Increase opportunities for students.

- Create more student scholarship, summer fellowship, and post-grad fellowship opportunities.
- Develop new structures (*e.g.*, institutes, centers, projects, initiatives) to enhance our ability to create and fund additional educational opportunities for our students interested in key public policy and social justice issues.

Goal 3. Diversify revenue streams.

- Launch a part-time *Juris Doctor* program.
- Pursue opportunities to expand the type of legal education the law school provides (*e.g.*, joint and dual degree programs, certification programs, two-year masters in law program, programs for foreign lawyers sitting for the bar).

Strategic Imperative VI: Attract and enroll students committed to our mission.

To continue attracting diverse students committed to social change and service to others, we will refine our messaging to emphasize our public interest mission, educational value, the needs of New York's urban community, and new initiatives. We will engage volunteers to build connections with admitted students, expand our outreach throughout the CUNY system, and create structures that facilitate a robust exchange of students between the law school and other campuses.

Goal 1: Strengthen our outreach to prospective students.

- Strengthen our multi-channel, creative student recruitment campaign with a focus on increasing the applicant pool and launching the part-time *Juris Doctor* program.
- Increase the use of faculty, students, and alumni in recruitment.
- Expand data collection and utilize predictive modeling to assist in targeted recruitment.

Goal 2: Strengthen programs to enhance access to the legal profession.

- Strengthen and extend the Pipeline to Justice program.
- Provide more scholarships to enhance diversity and enrollment.
- Strengthen our relations with CUNY colleges that have diverse student bodies to encourage and prepare more graduates to attend CUNY School of Law.

Strategic Imperative VII: Enhance our sense of community.

Maintaining a supportive and vibrant community is critical to our success. At CUNY Law, we pride ourselves on being an extraordinarily diverse organization that values varied, cultural backgrounds and histories. Our goals in this area are focused on ensuring that we remain a vibrant and diverse community that is supportive of its members. In addition to working to enhance our internal communication, we also want to work smarter and more efficiently, taking full advantage of the new technology that is all around us.

Goal 1. Create opportunities to come together in community.

- Create opportunities for greater internal community interaction, including potential improvements to the physical space and building access.
- Develop opportunities to support those in our community with childcare responsibilities.
- Improve building access for people with disabilities.

Goal 2. Improve our internal communication.

- Enhance our internal communication through the use of technology (*e.g.*, community calendar, videoconferencing) that fosters information-sharing.
- Create more opportunities to communicate, inform, and engage the law school community in discussions on important policy decisions.
- Enhance opportunities for training the law school community to work across cultures and respect diversity.

Goal 3. Reduce bureaucracy; become more nimble and efficient.

- Streamline administrative processes within the bounds of the CUNY infrastructure.
- Implement technological improvements to reduce paper-intensive processes (*e.g.*, community server).