

Education, Legal

Most likely, it has always been the best of times and the worst of times in legal education, for ever since it set up shop within the university, legal education has led a double life. We train students to enter a profession that most of us fled after brief exposure or never entered at all. At the same time, frequently armed only with a J.D., we engage in scholarship that we wish to be given equal status with that produced by Ph.D.s in other university departments.

This dual existence may be either a recipe for exciting, pathbreaking work, or it may be a recipe for disaster. Currently it is both. On the one hand, because the law and legal institutions are relatively determinate objects of study, but ones that touch all aspects of life, they represent a fertile field of study for the various disciplines and their established methodologies. With increasing frequency, those disciplines, or those trained in the methodologies of those disciplines, are producing sophisticated and important scholarship about law and legal institutions.

On the other hand, there are periodic calls within legal education to place more emphasis on vocational training. While the clinical education movement waxes and wanes, and though its emphases change somewhat over time, it always represents a challenge to the law school's affiliation with the university and law's status as an independent scholarly discipline.

Caught between the established scholarly disciplines' studies of law and narrow vocational training, the typical lawyer-teacher now faces an identity crisis. Does law have sufficient integrity and autonomy as an institution to give the lawyer-teacher a distinctive scholarly voice and/or a distinctive educational voice?

-- From one of ~100 articles