

**Thomas M. Cooley Law School's Strategic Plan for Twenty-First Century
Legal Education
Updated by the Board of Directors
June 20, 2009**

Introduction to the 2009 Strategic Plan – Thomas M. Cooley Law School adopted its Strategic Plan, the first in the School's history, in a fairly traditional manner. A representative group of board members, faculty, and staff met under the guidance of an outside consultant; identified Cooley's strengths and challenges; discussed all the items suggested within the group; narrowed the items to a manageable number; prioritized each of these items in the context of a proposed overall strategy to improve the School; and instructed the consultant to prepare a report.

The Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee and the School's Dean then restructured the consultant's report and drafted a proposed Strategic Plan with a Mission Statement, a Vision Statement, five Vision Strategies each with four subparts, and nine Strategic Initiatives. After review by the Strategic Planning Committee and the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors adopted the Strategic Plan in January 2002.

The Strategic Plan reaffirmed the basic concept that had governed the School since its inception—that its mission was to prepare its graduates for the practice of law. The Plan articulated that mission as having a three-fold aspect—assuring that our students acquire the appropriate knowledge, skills, and ethics to be competent attorneys. The Vision Statement called for Cooley to be (1) the largest law school in the country, (2) the best at practice preparation, (3) the most affordable, unsubsidized private law school, (4) a leader in innovative legal education, and (5) financially strong.

One shared, but unarticulated, principle that was not included in the 2002 Plan was that Cooley should provide accessibility to law school for all qualified students who were interested in a legal education. That principle was subsequently written into the School's Mission Statement in 2007 to assure that the American Bar Association would recognize that Cooley's mission was committed to providing an opportunity to those who aspired to a legal education.

Unlike many such plans that fall into disuse, Cooley's Strategic Plan became the central feature of the School's operations. Responsibility for each of the Plan's Strategic Initiatives was identified in the Plan. The School's President and Dean formed a Leadership Group and assigned aspects of the Plan's implementation to each leader. From that point forward, all decisions were made based on the Strategic Plan, all reports and evaluations were done in the context of the Plan, and constituencies within the School were educated about all aspects of the Plan. The Plan today is a central focus of the School's related planning and assessment, the main feature of its marketing and web presence, and the basis for several other plans and initiatives. Today, virtually everyone at Cooley is familiar with the School's dual missions of practice preparation and access, and nearly everyone knows the five key visions, including the student body.

Cooley quickly became the largest law school. The School can certainly argue with some confidence that it is the best at practice preparation, although this is a highly subjective aspect of the Plan. Over the years, despite the approval of a number of competing new low-cost law schools, the School has improved its relative affordability through a combination of low tuition and merit scholarships. Cooley's innovations are well-known today, particularly its three-year evening and weekend part-time schedules, multiple locations, and unique year-round educational program. For the past several years, Cooley has ranked in the top five law schools for total revenue, total tuition revenue, and profitability.

The original horizon for the Strategic Plan was a decade, although the underlying premise was that a review would be conducted in five years. The Plan proved to be so valuable in shaping Cooley's planning and programming over that period that the Board continued the original Plan in place unchanged for over seven years, except for adding the access aspect to the Mission. Last year, Cooley began consideration of a new plan.

Having continually assessed the Plan's implementation over the past seven years, it was determined that a traditional planning process, largely replicating the original process, was unnecessary. All elements of the School are fairly well-versed in the Plan and capable of making assessments of both the School's relative success in implementation and the School's continuing strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities of the School. The availability of on-line survey capacity presented an opportunity for much wider participation in evaluating the current plan and making suggestions regarding a new plan.

Accordingly, over an eight-month period under the leadership of Associate Dean of Planning, Programs, and Assessment Ann Wood, all board members, faculty, and staff were invited to respond to a three-part survey about the mission and vision of the law school. Nearly unanimous support for both aspects of the Mission Statement and strong support for the five visions was confirmed, to the extent that to substantially change or eliminate any aspect of them would likely lower rather than increase consensus within each group. No consensus regarding possible new visions was revealed.

Most of the suggestions offered were tactical or practical suggestions, or comments and observations of things the School could emphasize, rather than proposed new statements of vision or strategy. The survey provided a significant number of ideas that can be considered and implemented, along with suggestions for special projects that could be tried. Indeed, some of these have already been initiated since the surveys were completed. Others relate to management of our efforts, our marketing concepts, and internal communication. While these did not rise to the level of strategic planning, they provide valuable guidance on future implementation of this updated Strategic Plan.

Mission

The School has had essentially the same mission since its inception, and that mission will remain in effect:

The Mission of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School is to prepare its graduates for entry into the legal profession through an integrated program with practical legal education as its guiding principle and focus. This mission includes providing broad access to those who seek the opportunity to study law, while requiring those to whom that opportunity is offered to meet Cooley's rigorous academic standards.

The preparation for practice mission means that Cooley graduates must: (1) master the fundamentals and basic skills required for the competent practice of law and representation of clients; (2) demonstrate the substantive knowledge and skills required for passage of the bar examination and admission to the bar; and (3) understand and embrace the legal, moral, ethical, and professional responsibilities of lawyers.

Vision Statement

The School's vision for the next decade is to be one of the best law schools in the country at preparing its graduates for the practice of law, to remain America's largest law school, to continue to be one of the most affordable private law schools in the nation, to be a leader in the innovative and flexible delivery of legal education, and to remain financially strong.

Vision Strategies

To fulfill the mission and vision statements, the Thomas M. Cooley Law School will address a number of vision strategies.

Remain the Best at Preparing Students for Practice - Commentary from the bench and bar identifies declining preparation for practice among law school graduates as a serious problem. Contrary to this trend, Cooley already delivers high-quality preparation for practice, as comments from externship supervisors confirm. Continued improvement will serve the profession, protect the future clients of our graduates, and enhance the School's image.

In order to be the best at preparation for practice, the School intends to:

1. Deliver legal education with superior results, including high bar passage rates and high employment rates among graduates;
2. Enhance programs and courses to help graduates prepare to practice law with professionalism and good character;

3. Provide high-quality facilities and technology for teaching and learning practice skills; and

4. Use a comprehensive assessment system that measures the success of our students and graduates in mastering practice and analytical skills, passing bar examinations, and embracing professional responsibility.

Remain America's Largest Law School - Cooley is currently the largest law school in the nation and the largest provider of part-time education. Becoming the largest undergraduate law school in the nation enhanced the School's image; allowed for additional programs and a greater variety of courses to be offered; and provided additional financial resources to enhance existing programs, services, and support of students. Growth also underscored the School's philosophy that it should offer access and a fair opportunity to nontraditional students who have a reasonable chance to succeed.

In order to remain the largest, the School intends to:

1. Reduce its current academic and nonacademic attrition rates;
2. Increase its enrollment of students whose LSAT scores are at or above the median;
3. Expand through strategic partnerships and alliances; and
4. Open new markets, perhaps with additional degree programs, branch campuses, international programs, and distance education.

Continue to Be One of the Most Affordable Private Law Schools - Cooley is an independent private school that receives no subsidies from any source, public or private. Unlike state schools, which receive government subsidies, and most private schools, which share some university resources, Cooley depends mainly on tuition and donations. Cooley is already one of the least expensive private schools, exceeded in affordability by only a handful of private schools that do not receive some sort of outside subsidy.

By remaining affordable in an increasingly expensive market, Cooley can better compete for quality students and can reduce the indebtedness of its graduates. As the economy tightens, demand for legal education increases, and so does applicants' attention to the cost.

In order to become more affordable, the School intends to:

1. Continue to keep its tuition in the bottom quarter among private law schools;
2. Provide a "best value" in legal education;
3. Increase its support for need-based scholarships; and
4. Increase enrollment at the branch campuses.

Be a Leader in Innovation - Innovation has two aspects for a practice-oriented school: it must prepare its graduates for the technology- and information-based world of twenty-first century law practice, and it must innovate delivering legal education. To

teach students how to practice law in the future, the School must envision the future of law.

In order to be a leader in innovation, the School intends to:

1. Push the envelope, adopting an aggressive approach to change;
2. Create new programs and classes to prepare students for practice;
3. Introduce new ways to deliver legal education; and
4. Increase the School's use of technology to enhance the education of Cooley students in the use of technology in the current and future practice of law.

Remain a Financially-Strong Law School - Even though it has grown enormously over the past 25 years and has never had a year in which expenses exceeded revenues, the School's tuition-based finances do limit its ability to expand and innovate.

In order to enhance its financial position, the School intends to:

1. Increase the number and amount of donations from alumni and friends;
2. Find outside resources that provide the flexibility to pursue opportunities;
3. Grow the School's Endowment Fund; and
4. Examine the current cost structure to reduce expenses.

Strategic Initiatives

The Board has identified a number of initiatives or actions that should be undertaken promptly as the first steps in implementing the Strategic Plan.

1. The Board will remain active in its governance of the School's affairs. To that end, it has reorganized with a new committee structure, which includes an Executive Committee, an Audit Committee, a Bylaws Committee, a Corporate Development Committee, a Nominating Committee, an Investment Committee, and a Strategic Planning Committee. (Oversight responsibility - Bylaws Committee)

2. The Board and the President should continue to define the roles and responsibilities of senior management, including the responsibilities of corporate officers for Academics, Administration, Budget and Finance, Operations, and Technology. (Oversight responsibility - Bylaws Committee)

3. The Board and the President should review the present status and future needs of the physical plant and the infrastructure to support technology. (Oversight responsibility - Audit Committee)

4. The Board and the President should review current policies and practices to improve the School's financial stability, including a review of the balance sheet, capital investments, programmatic investments, and efficiency of the current cost structure. (Oversight responsibility - Audit Committee)

5. The Board and the President should develop new products, services, and markets, including consideration of new degree programs, branch campuses, international programs, and partnerships and associations with other educational institutions. (Oversight responsibility - Strategic Planning Committee)

6. The Board and the President should expand fundraising efforts. (Oversight responsibility - Corporate Development Committee)

7. The Board and the President should undertake to enhance delivery of Cooley's core product - graduates who meet the mission of being prepared for practice, for the bar examination, and for the moral, ethical, and professional responsibilities of law practice - including steps to improve the student profile, improve bar results, and reduce attrition. (Oversight responsibility - Strategic Planning Committee)

8. The Board and the President should improve the School's image among the bench, bar, legal educators, and potential law-school applicants, including efforts within the School to enhance community and student life. (Oversight Responsibility - Strategic Planning Committee)

9. The Board should accept members into its ranks and elect the School's officers in a systematic manner, to ensure that the Board will be independent, diverse, and informed, and that the officers will be in tune with the School's mission and vision of itself. (Oversight responsibility - Nominating Committee)

Implementation - Everyone at Cooley Law School shares the responsibility for implementing this Strategic Plan. All stakeholders were either directly involved in creating the original Plan or were represented by others in the Strategic Plan Working Group, which included the leadership of the academic, library, and administrative departments. All stakeholders were provided the opportunity to participate in the surveys that form the basis of this update. Everyone must attend to this Plan and set aside personal preferences and priorities that might differ from the collective judgment that it represents. Acceptance of this responsibility and dedication to the Plan will ensure its success and secure a prominent place for the Thomas M. Cooley Law School in American legal education.

The individual members of the Board of Directors and the Board as an entity must implement this Plan through individual and collective effort. The Board's committees must carry out their oversight responsibilities. The Executive Committee must coordinate the efforts of the Board committees and serve as the liaison between the President and the Board in the recess between its meetings. The President is directed to assist the Board, the Executive Committee, and the designated Board committees in meeting their oversight responsibilities.

The President should take such action as the President deems necessary to fulfill the Vision Strategies and Strategic Initiatives included in the Strategic Plan and report to the Executive Committee the School's progress in meeting its measurable goals.

The officers, faculty, and employees of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School are directed to cooperate with the President and the Board in implementing the Plan and to undertake in a timely manner such assignments and take such actions as the President directs.

Approved by Strategic Planning Committee (December 6, 2001)

Approved by Executive Committee (December 7, 2001)

Adopted by Board of Directors (January 19, 2002)

Adopted by the Board of Directors (June 20, 2009)