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February 7, 2008, 4:51 pm

Law School Dean Hits Road to Help Students Get Jobs

Posted by Dan Slater



Given all the cynicism surrounding career prospects for law students at so-called third- and fourth-tier schools, we were happy when, last May, we [came across](#) Mark Gordon (pictured), the dean of [University of Detroit Mercy School of Law](#). In a [WSJ article](#), Law Blog colleague Amir Efrati detailed an initiative by Gordon, a [Law Blog Moustache Society](#) member, to help his students get jobs by assembling a team of big firm partners to advise the school on its third-year curriculum.

Now Gordon has turned his sights abroad, striking a deal with a Mexican law school to build a five-year joint-degree program. In 2008, Gordon will unveil a venture between his Detroit Mercy and Mexico's [El Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey](#). The two schools will offer students a five-year program — three in the U.S., two in Mexico — that will qualify them to practice in the States and in Mexico.

“We think there’s a market for law firms wanting to hire students that have this kind of knowledge,” Gordon said of the program, which will require participants to take several classes in Spanish.

Curious as to whether such a program *would* help beef up a resume, we called up [David Leinwand](#), the hiring partner at Cleary Gottlieb to ask what he thought.

“Clearly, it’s attractive,” said Leinwand. “Among the qualities we look for, given the foreign nature of our practice, is language ability and experience outside the U.S. . . . It will certainly enhance a student’s candidacy.” That said, Leinwand wasn’t about to open Cleary’s doors to all of the program’s graduates. “The student still needs the other qualifications that we seek.”

So let’s turn it over to you, Law Blog readers, whaddya think? Will Dean Gordon’s new program up the status of Detroit Mercy grads in the eyes of firm hiring honchos?

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If you want to practice crossborder law, firms recruit from Harvard, Yale, Stanford then CCN, etc. Get the drift. I'm not a T14er, but there's only so many firms that do this type of work. Unless your background includes being the king of siam's personal negotiator for oil contracts, firms won't care about what you did in a t3-4 law school

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [4:59 pm](#)

Horrible, horrible idea. Drastically increases the debt load for minimal returns. Why not establish this partnership with China, India or Russia?

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [5:13 pm](#)

Wow...the legal profession is such a bad state that graduates are actually considering workin in

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Mexico? Glad i dropped out after my first year.

Comment by lola - February 7, 2008 at [5:18 pm](#)

the best way to reduce unemployment among, is to simply shut the school down. There is no reason why this and many other law schools continue to exist.

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [5:26 pm](#)

OH GAWD, here comes the whole "I'm an elitist insecure snob" vs. "I'm a bare bones, gumshoe hardnose warrior" battle of the law school alums. Let the insanity begin.

Comment by Dirk Diggler - February 7, 2008 at [5:28 pm](#)

I could see value in this for Mexican law students as a way to get a foot into the U.S. But for American students, there has to be close to zero marginal value of the Mexican degree. Both because they are unlikely to need to practice in Mexico and because the firms for whom the international aspect is valuable are unlikely to hire from Detroit Mercy.

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [5:35 pm](#)

They send us people to help us with our construction, clean our houses, tend to our gardens, and we send them our lawyers... It doesn't seem like a fair trade to Mexico!

Comment by consider it a swap... - February 7, 2008 at [5:38 pm](#)

"The student still needs the other qualifications that we seek."

Translation: "Nice try but we require biglaw grades and a top tier degree."

Comment by toilet lawyer - February 7, 2008 at [5:43 pm](#)

For Mexican law students, this would be silly, since there has always been a route to US practice — earning an LLM in a one year program from one of the top US schools. For US laws students, I honestly don't think it's going to be more than marginally worthwhile in terms of top-tier law firms, though there could be a bit more demand for these students in firms in the Southwest that do large volumes of cross-border work.

Comment by anon2 - February 7, 2008 at [5:43 pm](#)

Sorry, but I don't think American firms will value Detroit Mercy graduates appreciably more (as the Cleary partner diplomatically implied). Better that they do a fifth year in France or in Germany at a top French or German law school — then apply for a white shoe firm's Paris or Frankfurt office, etc.

The real problem here is that we are bifurcating, folks. The very top schools now have enough money to offer free tuition to all (Yale, etc. are inching in this direction). The result is that there will soon be NO overlap (LSAT/GPA) between the student bodies at these schools and those of every other school. Other schools, even other first tier schools, are sweating it out. Third and fourth tier schools will have to become low-cost providers, that is their only option.

Comment by lawprof - February 7, 2008 at [5:46 pm](#)

For people who have no other option, attend Detroit-Mercy's three year program, take Spanish classes at night, and graduate with less debt >>> this 5 year program.

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [5:54 pm](#)

I appreciate the Dean of a law school actually DOING SOMETHING about getting jobs.... the Mexico-US idea may not be the right format for his school, but this guy get's an A for effort.

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [5:57 pm](#)

you guys do realize not everybody gets a law degree so they can practice biglaw. Get over yourselves.

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [6:20 pm](#)

6:20, people who are insecure and obsessed with the whole NYC BigLaw/degree scene can't imagine **Digg** -- submit this item to be shared and voted

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The Wall Street Journal's Law Blog focuses on law and business, and the business of law. Dan Slater is the lead writer. Dan joined The Wall Street Journal from The Deal magazine. Before becoming a journalist, Dan worked as a litigator at a New York law firm. The blog's founding writer was Peter Lattman, who now covers private equity for the Journal.

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a world outside of it.

That said, I think it's great that the Dean is trying to come up with new ideas, but a five-year crossover program isn't going to work unless he can show that it will lead to concrete benefits for the students.

Comment by khazeh - February 7, 2008 at [6:33 pm](#)

If you mix five pounds of ice cream with five pounds of donkey poo, you have ten pounds of donkey poo.

If you mix TTT JD with "Mexican credentials"...Hot damn! Now you're talking!

Comment by Lionel Hutz - February 7, 2008 at [6:59 pm](#)

To all you bloggers on this page...have you ever travelled to Mexico? Classical American comments to say that all we have is donkey poo. Quite uncultured of you. This is one of the reasons why Americans are hated throughout the world.

Comment by Allison Aston - February 7, 2008 at [7:13 pm](#)

Ding! Mexico troll.

I suppose you think medical credentials from Mexico are great. Have you met my friend Dr. Nick Riviera AKA Miguel Sanchez AKA Dr. Nguyen van Falk?

Comment by Lionel Hutz - February 7, 2008 at [7:32 pm](#)

I graduated from a tier 4 law school. I have no debt and work at a V15 firm. Who's dumb now?

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [8:19 pm](#)

Detroit Mercy is the Harvard of the 4th Tier!

Comment by UDM Alum - February 7, 2008 at [8:20 pm](#)

8:19

I'm the Lord Jesus Christ reborn! Take me at my word!

Imbecile.

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [9:21 pm](#)

The dean needs to cut law school tuition. That festering toilet costs 28K a year. What a rip off.

Comment by Anonymous - February 7, 2008 at [9:53 pm](#)

What genius thought up how to extract two more years of tuition before kicking the suckers out into the cold hard world with 66% more debt and missing two of the best years of their lives. Can I buy stock in the Motor city U?

Comment by Not a lawyer, not even on NBC - February 7, 2008 at [10:21 pm](#)

Does anyone remember a guy named Ivan Boesky? He graduated from Detroit Law School, now Michigan State University, he seemed to have no problem navigating through Wall Street. More recently, Societe Generale got stuck while looking down its nose at a so called undesirable. Underestimation?

Comment by Affirmed - February 7, 2008 at [10:46 pm](#)

My T2 tuition was \$37k last year, with total student budget in the mid-60's. None of us have jobs either.

Comment by \$26k is chump change - February 7, 2008 at [11:51 pm](#)

A better idea is for T4s to get a JD/MBA because unless there is an overall job surge in Michigan, more lawyers and bilingual grads won't matter. Michigan has the highest unemployment rate. No

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companies means no workers and no lawyers. Det-Mer Law grads need to be starting companies that hire Michigan people.

Comment by A good idea - February 8, 2008 at [1:11 am](#)

I agree with the poster who says at least this Dean's doing something. I think the best thing the Dean from my T2 has come up with is not hit the unemployed majority up for donations — yet.

Comment by JD2007 - February 8, 2008 at [8:18 am](#)

Good news for all you (and soon to be) unemployed lawyers - Mexico recently raised its minimum wage to \$4.85 per DAY!

Comment by Tom Collins - February 8, 2008 at [8:46 am](#)

Ironic that a law school has "Mercy" in its name. The word is often in Catholic hospitals' names.

Also, two years is the usual sentence for Americans caught with drugs sans a prescription in Mexico. Truly a joint program.

Comment by Tom Collins - February 8, 2008 at [9:03 am](#)

Curious as to whether such a program would help beef up a resume, we called up David Leinwand, the hiring partner at Cleary Gottlieb to ask what he thought.

"Clearly, it's attractive," said Leinwand. "Among the qualities we look for, given the foreign nature of our practice, is language ability and experience outside the U.S. . . . It will certainly enhance a student's candidacy." That said, Leinwand wasn't about to open Cleary's doors to all of the program's graduates. "The student still needs the other qualifications that we seek."

+++++

Translation: "TTTTers have no chance of getting into Biglaw."

Comment by ed wopd - February 8, 2008 at [9:20 am](#)

Affirmed - Michigan State University's law school (which used to be Detroit College of Law) is a different school than Detroit Mercy. Learn how to read.

And yes, Boesky did go to DCL, but there are more recent criminals/shady characters that you can cite. See, Safavian, David or Kilpatrick, Kwame. Thanks.

Comment by MSU - February 8, 2008 at [9:39 am](#)

To: consider it a swap - February 7, 2008 at 5:38 pm

"They send us people to help us with our construction, clean our houses, tend to our gardens, and we send them our lawyers... It doesn't seem like a fair trade to Mexico!"

Those construction workers, house cleaners and gardeners are Mexican lawyers.

Comment by Tom Collins - February 8, 2008 at [9:40 am](#)

Man, law school sounds kinda hard! and in Mexico no less!

Comment by RATRATRAT - February 8, 2008 at [9:55 am](#)

6:20 - not everyone may dream of biglaw, but how else does one reasonably pay down the six-figure debt you take out to attend a T3/T4 school? It's not like you get a discount for attending a low ranked school.

Comment by goldie - February 8, 2008 at [10:06 am](#)

The name of the school in Monterrey is "Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey."

If they refer to themselves as "El Tecnológico etc.," it is because the school is well-known and the "Instituto" is omitted the way that references to Harvard, Columbia and Yale omit "University."

I studied Spanish language there in a summer school program for US students years ago.

Comment by It is Instituto, not El Tecnologico - February 8, 2008 at [10:32 am](#)

Atrocious idea. That dean ought to be ashamed of himself. Two additional years of debt for these poor, ignorant students??? I grew up in Michigan and know a bit about recent employment difficulties there. T3/T4 graduates are in trouble from the get-go, whether they aspire to BigLaw or not. Add in additional debt (and wasted time) and the hole only grows deeper than before. It truly pains me to read things like this. Why not focus on remedial programs to shore up the 3Ls writing and analytic skills, then sponsor more networking events with firms of all sizes in the Midwest? Or, as another poster suggested, shut down the damn school? Ouch.

Comment by a painful joke - February 8, 2008 at [11:05 am](#)

I have some doubts about the utility of this program, but there are probably other factors at play I'm not considering. Maybe the program lets them land a particular faculty member or intersects with some university-wide collaboration between the two institutions. Who knows? I do think it's good that they're thinking about how to make their students more attractive to future employers. Taking a quick look at their website, it looks like the school has a lot of clinics and moot court opportunities. They also have an extremely high bar passage rate. If you're a small firm in Michigan looking to hire a new grad, you definitely want someone who already has some practical skills and will pass the bar. It sounds like they're on the right track.

Comment by Anonymous - February 8, 2008 at [12:11 pm](#)

This program makes no sense. It's hard enough to pay off law school debt even when you do have a well-paying job. I agree with the other posters that this program would only increase student debt without giving these students any greater chances of finding a job that could pay off their debt. I think it's great that the dean is tackling this problem, but touting this idea as a "solution" or even a significant step in the right direction sounds preposterous to me.

Comment by Associate in Debt - February 8, 2008 at [2:34 pm](#)

Nice going Dean Gordon! No one could have thought of a stronger retaliation for Mexico's sending millions of illegals to the US than sending American lawyers to Mexico. Just watch how fast the Mexicans build their fence.

Comment by Tom Collins - February 8, 2008 at [2:50 pm](#)

Might as well call the degree by its real name: JD in Maquiladora Contract Negotiations.

Comment by Michigander - February 8, 2008 at [3:54 pm](#)

Wow, the bias against Mexico based on blatant ignorance from today's posters is overwhelming. Perhaps the so called super elite from biglaw need to spend a year at the "TEC" so they know what they are talking about. Can any of the foregoing posters actually claim to have examined the Mexican university system? Did you ever read the WSJ's rankings of the TEC among international business schools? Do you have any idea what the average billable hour is for a Mexican attorney? Apparently not, as your ignorance and bias that Mexico is full of gardeners and maids rather than educated professionals pours out of your messages.

Comment by Disgusted - February 8, 2008 at [4:40 pm](#)

Disgusted: what IS the average billable hour for a Mexican attorney?

Also, if you'd lighten up, you'd realize that what's being criticized is not Mexico, but the idea of this particular program, which will not provide a big boost to either Mexican or US law students.

Comment by lighten up - February 8, 2008 at [4:46 pm](#)

What Tier Law School is Monterrey?

Comment by no doubt sixth tier, behind non-ABA approved law schools! - February 8, 2008 at [6:04 pm](#)

The comments here are very entertaining. Glad I shelled out to get online Wall Street Journal subscription.

Comment by Anonymous - February 8, 2008 at [8:05 pm](#)

Force law schools to either accept less students or shut down all together. They are still producing far more young attorneys than the labor market can support.

Comment by Better Solution - February 8, 2008 at [8:17 pm](#)

LOL.....another lousy school charging an arm and a leg and subjecting its grads to a lifetime of debt. How exactly does having a joint degree venture with another country help your forever poor grads get a job? An extra two years means another \$50,000 of debt!!! Lower you tuition to about \$3000 per year. People that are smart enough and work hard in law school shouldn't be punished for their efforts whether its at T1 or T4.

Comment by Bob - February 8, 2008 at [11:23 pm](#)

My classmates from law school got jobs, became partners in 6-8 years, make great money, have a terrific lifestyle and are great lawyers. They are not struggling. I use them as local counsel all the time.

Many of them are partners with top tier grads. Most of us stayed at DCL because of the scholarship money and our ties to Detroit. While I make more money, the QOL here is much lower. Our school has a bunch of joint degree programs now, and I encourage my firm to look there for candidates. And there are other alums in the NYC area who are doing well - probably making more money than me - some of them by starting their own firms or working with niche firms. The ability to practice law and run a business is simply not related to whether or not you attended a top tier school. Law school and the LSAT do not measure entrepreneurial capacity, which is what it takes to run a business, including the business of your career. (By the time I started working in NY, I had done more (para before law school, clerked for a small trial practice firm, clerked for a judge) than the fourth years at my firm.) I am not encouraging every t3/t4 student to run up the debt load. But there is so much more to life than biglaw (which is easily demonstrated by looking at biglaw's attrition rate). It is not captured in one test, in 4 years of undergrad grades, or 3 years of law school grades. Frankly, none of the alums I'm still friends with measure our lives by where we went to law school and most of us really don't think about it. People from local schools get jobs and become significant in their communities - look at where the judges and legislators and city and state attorneys in Michigan came from. When I graduated, something like 2/3 of the attorneys in Michigan's court system were grads of DCL, Mercy (It was U of D then) and Cooley. These schools also provided a workable night study program - 4.5 to 5 years - and a lot of grads were fully employed as they went to school. The ranks of executives at the industrial companies in Michigan were chock full of these people (tuition reimbursement was also common).

Also, I think the context is not appropriately presented. The Detroit/Mexico connection is highly specialized due to the auto industry and subordinate manufacturing issues. I have received a number of requests over the years from my classmates for referrals to lawyers who practice cross border transactions specifically with a view to Mexico. Similar programs were started with Canada and international law concentrations by a lot of schools in the 1980s and those grads had great placement statistics. It can be very significant to employers that a person has at least a basic familiarity with the terms of art and statutory schemes of these niche practice areas.

Law school ranking is like ice dancing. You can't change the minds of the people who make these rankings, but if your constituency is local, you can make programs that make your school appeal to that local student body that cannot up and move to Boston or New Haven, even if they got in. There are legitimate reasons for the "lesser known" law schools to exist, including to accomodate people with a first career.

And the scholarship issue - when I attended, of a class of about 100, there were about 20 full riders and 30 half riders plus plenty of work positions that paid stipends (basically, covered the book cost). Most of these were merit based. Need based aid was also available. And I'm just talking about the day section.

Comment by DCL Grads - February 10, 2008 at [11:35 am](#)

All I know about Mexico is the Free Trade Agreement, something about Mexican truckers, their nationalized oil, and booming real estate in Cabos San Lucas.

If we can do enough legitimate commerce with Mexico, then maybe there will be good paying jobs for the vast majority of hard-working law graduates who aren't Einstein brainiacs and aren't sliding into Daddy's firm.

Comment by Sanka - February 10, 2008 at [5:02 pm](#)

I went to UDM. It isn't really a bad place, but Detroit is horrible. UDM deserves a better ranking just for not being looted or burned down by the degenerates it has for neighbors.

Somehow I overcame the UDM death sentence against going to a sophisticated, national firm. I was screwed with national firms initially, but eventually ended up at one and I'm a partner [but as others have said, that's not as great as it sounds sometimes].

But this Mexican venture is a stupid idea. A JD/MBA would be better, but UDM isn't a very good business school either. I think you need a decent MBA as I did if you want to use it to overcome a UDM JD and want to score outside Detroit in the job search.

On the other hand, the former DCL, mentioned above, bailed on Detroit, bless their hearts, and aligned with Michigan State. It's a good program virtually collocated with a top 25 B-school program. Plenty of their grads do well without the joint degree, but their MBA/JD is certainly worth it.

I got a UDM JD degree at night. I was working in downtown Detroit for a national consulting firm, didn't want to give my income, and never planned to practice. The firm paid most of my tuition, and I just wanted the education for business. I had a decent undergrad degree but a top 10 MBA, and I had been a Navy Officer. I could have gone to a top 20 or so school, maybe better, if I wanted a full time program. I had top law school grades -around 20% or so - but since it was UDM I had to be ... ahem.... creative in a job search.

I changed my mind in my last year. I wanted to practice. But that MBA was the only thing that saved me. A classmate who worked at Ford had a NYU (Stern) MBA and he escaped Detroit also. I don't know how many others did.

UDM had zero reach back then. There was no real placement staff. There were hardly any firms interviewing there from outside SE Michigan. Even the decent Grand Rapids firms never visited. I got interviews only by having a friend at UM fax the recruiting schedule to me. I found out who was making the trip for the firms, called them, and asked if I could meet them after or before they visited Ann Arbor. If that didn't work I made up a story about a business trip to Chicago, Denver, Dallas, or wherever they were based. I got some interviews with that scam. I was pissed I had to resort to that, but I deserved it for my strategic error – not going to the best school I could get into.

Dean Gordon has to be commended for doing something. I would try to improve the applicant pool, but that would be impossible. Even here in DC and Virginia, it's hard for American and GWU (except that they have evening programs like UDM) to compete top programs like UVA Georgetown. But it has to be a helluva lot easier to sell American and GWU programs because young people think DC is a lot better place to live than Detroit. Maybe that's why these programs are more selective.

Maybe UDM should have looked at some sort of venture in Eastern/Western Europe, where the schools are truly global. I think Detroit-based Miller Canfield, with over 300 lawyers, has some offices and business through offices in Poland. And with the EU expanding, it's a lot more remunerative to have skills there than in Mexico, I think.

Comment by Bad Idea - February 11, 2008 at [3:54 pm](#)

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