



Law School Academic and Career Advising Reimagined

[Transcript]

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Susannah Pollvogt: Hi, everyone, and welcome. I'm Susannah Pollvogt, and I'm the principal consultant for academics and curriculum for LSAC's Legal Education Consulting Group, or LEC. You may have heard of LEC. We started out doing admissions and enrollment consulting primarily, but then law schools were coming to us with other sorts of challenges, and so we've moved into some additional areas. My area of specialization is curriculum mapping, ABA site visit preparation, academic support and bar passage programs, and also next-gen bar exam preparedness, Jim?

Jim Leipold: My name is Jim Leipold. I'm the longtime executive director at NALP, and now I am working back at the Law School Admission Council as part of our Legal Education Consulting team. I'm working with career services offices at law schools across the country, helping them optimize their employment outcomes and also looking at best practices in terms of staffing and student professional identity formation

development and that sort of thing. We want to thank you for being with us here today. Our purpose is to talk a little bit about the changing face of academic advising and career counseling in the law school setting today, two really critical functions in terms of the outputs that law schools produce and are measured by, and yet there are things that often happen very independently from one another in a very siloed way without much coordination. And beyond being siloed, there are often things that have traditionally been the sole responsibility of a handful of staff members. And we're in an environment now where that just doesn't work. Both of these need to be whole-school shared responsibilities. And what we want to do in our time with you today is to explore a little bit why these functions are so critical to legal education, why they're related, and why the most successful law schools are using a whole-school approach to tackle these, Susannah.

Susannah: Great, so we'll be presenting you with some information and some ideas, but it's really important to us to also hear from you and hear about your experiences. So please use the Q&A function liberally to let us know what you're thinking about. And we're also going to use the polling function to learn a little bit more about those of you in our audience today. So the first question we have for you is to tell us about your role at your law school. Are you a dean of students? Are you in academic support, career services, other student services, or an associate dean for academic affairs? And we'll let those results come in, and then we'll share them with you in a moment. All right, so Jim, looks like your career services colleagues are well represented here today.

Jim: That's great.

Susannah: Okay, fantastic, thank you for sharing that information with us. Okay, so our second question is, how well do you feel that your current system of academic advising is serving your students right now? And if you want to elaborate on your response, please, again, feel free to use the Q&A function. All right, well, Jim, I'm glad we're holding this webinar here today because 8% of you responded that your current academic advising system is serving students very well. So that tells me there's a lot of room for improvement, to be sure.

Jim: And then one more intro question before we get started, and that is, how well is your current system of career advising serving your students? Serving them very well, serving them moderately well, not serving them very well.

Susannah: Wow, that is a very different picture from academic advising.

Jim: Okay, so we're doing, I guess, we have some consensus that we're doing a little bit better on career services than we are with academic advising. I want to talk a little bit about why we're having this conversation and why it's so important right now. One of the main things that's changed in legal education is simply how much more diverse our incoming classes are, and diverse in every possible way. We know that legal education

has been slow to change. It's a system that was designed a very long time ago to serve a particular group of people from a certain economic class, who had, there were certain common assumptions about their backgrounds and their families and their exposure to the world. And the world we live in now, as you all know, our 1L classes are made up of many people who do not come from that sort of traditional background. We know from every way that we measure diversity that each class that comes in has been dramatically more diverse than the last one.

So for the most recent class, 40.2%, over 40% were people of color, that is the highest ever. For the most recent class, almost 56% of the class were women, women now outweighing men significantly. Almost 15% of the class reported being LGBTQ+. And I think, probably most significantly for our conversation today, 24.2% of the class report being first-generation college. So that, all by itself, is a bit of a game changer. Students are coming in from all different backgrounds. We know they don't have the same background that students have traditionally have. We also know they don't have the same background, one from another. Within the same classroom, people have very different preparation. One thing that we know is that many more students, both in the career counseling setting and in academic advising need much more individual attention and one-on-one contact and support with respect to career counseling and academic advising than has been true in the past.

Susannah: And Jim, one of our guests asked if you could repeat the percentages of incoming students.

Jim: I can, and this is also published in a blog post on Lawfully that I wrote right after the ABA published its numbers, and so you can reference that. That's pretty easy to find on the LSAC website. But 40.2% of the entering class were students of color, 55.8% of the class were women, 14.7% of the class were LGBTQ+. And as this slide indicates, with that red curvy line, 24.2% of the class were first-generation in terms of matriculants. That's the highest percentage ever. That's great, I mean, those of us who've been working in this profession for a long, long time have spent our professional lives trying to diversify the legal academy, and we've been super successful on the front end. I feel very strongly that we all share a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that the outcomes are as equal as possible with as few disparities. And we know this isn't a webinar about the disparities and outcomes, but we know, in terms of our passage and academic success and success in the job market, that there are huge disparities by race and ethnicity, by first generation, by gender, by LGBTQ status. And so it's one of the markers that tells us our current approach to academic advising and career counseling isn't serving this more diverse group of students as well as it might.

Susannah: Absolutely, and so for those of you that have asked, we also will have a blog post up on LSAC.org after this webinar that will include those numbers that Jim provided there. But it is really a stunning success that we have such a diverse student body coming in. But as Jim mentioned, legal education is very traditional, and there's a

lot of great things about that. But I think that we haven't necessarily adapted to the needs of our very diverse student bodies. And that's one of the areas in which advising can really come in and help. And Bo, thank you so much for that graph. We can go ahead and take that chart down now. I want to talk a little bit about some of the academic issues that our students bring to the fore right now. But one thing I wanted to mention, Jim, in connection with what you were talking about, is also this idea, this very fraught idea of professionalism. So not professional identity formation, but professionalism, right? And I think that I've, in my career, noticed many times faculty members and other, you know, folks in the administration saying, wow, I can't believe student X did this. You know, I can't believe they were five minutes late for a job interview or, you know, had a typo on their resume, right? And again, if someone comes from a family, is a second-generation professional, then we might expect those norms to be in place. But when students are first-generation college graduates in their family, they're not necessarily going to know those things that might seem to be obvious in terms of, you know, presenting yourself professionally as a law student and as an attorney.

So in addition to needing that individualized career guidance, we see a lot of issues with students on an academic level. And again, these are good things, right? With students with disabilities or neurodivergent conditions are coming to law school, which is fantastic. We need them in the profession. Many of you out there who are in student services or at ADAA also know that the number of accommodations that we're granting is skyrocketing. And there's some really complicated issues around that that I do think we need to figure out, right? We need to figure out to make sure that students are receiving accommodations in law school are also going to receive those accommodations on the bar exam, for example. A lot of times, there's a gap there.

There's a lot of COVID-era learning gaps, and I know those of you who are interacting with students now, or teaching students now are seeing some of those. And then outside of those trends, there's just a larger trend in legal education that's been written about for more and more students to be coming to us academically under-prepared, okay? So those of you who are in academic support or are familiar with the history of academic support know that academic support, well, it really started out as sort of diversity and equity type of programming and then really became more focused on students who were academically at risk. And these programs, oftentimes, you have one or two people serving an entire student body. These programs were originally designed to deal with the bottom 10% of the class or the bottom 25% of the class in terms of GPA, and that is very often not the case anymore. And I'm not, you know, talking only about schools where we might be concerned that students have risk factors. I think every law school has seen an increased need for academic support and bar passage support for their students.

And again, you know, it's part of the hidden curriculum, right? The students don't necessarily know, first of all, that succeeding in law school is different than succeeding in undergrad, or that preparing for the bar exam is a totally different endeavor in and of itself. So that just reinforces the point that Jim made vis-a-vis career counseling that students need individualized support. And that's very time and resource-intensive, but sometimes that's really the only way to get students where they need to go and to maximize their potential. So another question for you all now, what percentage of your students get individualized attention through your academic advising system? So not group sessions or small group sessions, but individualized attention. 25% or less, around 50%, or 75% or more. Okay, and as the results are coming in, we're seeing real polarization here with 25% or less and 75% or more sort of in a dead heat. But now as the poll finishes up, again, over half of you are saying less than 25% of your students receive individualized academic advising, which is, you know, a pretty stunning number.

And again, I encourage you, if you have more comments on that particular dynamic or want to explain why that's the case at your school, and I think it's the case at many, many schools, I'd love to see your comments in the Q&A. But let's go ahead and then move to the career analog. So what percentage of your students get individualized attention through your career advising system? Wow, Jim, we're going to have some interesting things to say here about the differences between career and academic advising. I wouldn't have thought that it would be so starkly different, but what we're seeing right now in the poll results, 90% are saying 75% or more of your students receive individualized career counseling, which is amazing and wonderful. And I suspect that many of these career services offices are not as fully staffed as they might be, so we're talking about people putting a lot of time and energy and effort into working with those students, which is fantastic.

Jim: Yeah, it doesn't surprise me that that number is so high for career services. Career counseling has always been a little bit of a one-on-one endeavor beyond the group programs. But one of the things I think many career services offices are struggling with right now is, notwithstanding the intense one-on-one contact, it's not enough. We still have groups of students who are not succeeding in the job market at a higher percentage than we would like. I think one of the important connections between academic advising and support and career services that a lot of schools haven't thought about in a deliberate enough way is that there's still tremendous pressure to do this programs that lead to early success. So what we used to call OCI, we still call it OCI sometimes, the big public interest fairs, people go through those programs, lots of them succeed, but for the students who don't, what I'm seeing in my consulting work is that most law schools have a group of 2Ls who have not succeeded in that. That has all happened at the end of the 1L year. They have feelings of shame and embarrassment, and what we actually see is an academic withdrawal. They withdraw from being engaged in the law school. And that re-engagement of those second and third years who have washed out of traditional, quote, unquote, recruiting programs is not

something that the career services office is staffed to handle on their own. I think one of the most important changes taking place in legal education right now is how we think about academic support and bar prep support. It used to be something that, traditionally, in the academy, we thought about as a piece of work that needed to be applied to a small group of students. And what we're seeing now is that intense academic support and bar prep support is necessary for more than half the class, often. And we just haven't staffed those functions in that way.

The same thing is true for career counseling, where we're seeing, what I'm seeing is many more students, into the third year, still needing individual attention at a time when you're dealing with 1Ls and 2Ls and that 3L one-on-one attention is super hard. And the reality of it takes a village is that there's all these other people in the law school who have contact with these students and will touch students in different ways. And cultivating that shared responsibility for meeting these obligations is really the emerging best practice and that cultivation of a whole-school approach. And in a few minutes, we'll get into a little bit of the nitty gritty about what that looks like, including data systems that might support that whole-school approach. Yeah, Susannah, I'm going to hand it back to you.

Susannah: Yeah, I want to pick up on a couple of things that you said there, Jim. So one point, and we're going to talk to you all about how the rubber hits the road, right? How to actually implement this whole-school approach to academic and career advising. But one thing I really want to emphasize in what Jim said is that you can't uncouple these, and they have been completely uncoupled. I mean, I think that, again, you know, your academic support folks, your student services folks, your career services folks, they all are paying close attention to what students need and trying to provide that. But I think it's the exception rather than the rule that folks, the different student services offices are really coordinated, right, through no fault of their own, but it's just sort of the nature of how we've typically done things. But what, what you pointed out Jim, is that it's really connected, so your early, early academic performance influences your early job prospects, your academic performance also influences your bar passage chances. And then all of that influences the psyche of the student, right, and that sort of disengagement, right? In academic support, we refer to these students as the slippery fish. They're the ones who really need our support the most, but because of maybe feelings of shame or being overwhelmed, right, or other outside obligations, they actually are the least likely to come to us and take advantage of those resources.

Another point that you made that I want to highlight is the number of people in the building, right, who could be helping with academic and career issues and how, you know, I'm going to talk about this in a minute, but how many hands make light work, right? So the more folks you have involved, the less overwhelming it is for, you know, our professionals in career services and academic support to deal with that. And the other thing that I see is I see students who have wonderful relationships with career

services folks and academic support folks, but it's the faculty who have them as a captive audience in their classroom, right? And the faculty, obviously, you are presenting the core curriculum, and if academic performance and career development and bar passage are important to us, there should be things that are talked about, right, by those faculty members. You know, in the context even of the classroom, it doesn't have to be, you know, a long, drawn-out discourse about it, but something that really pervades all parts of the school, including the core curriculum. All right, so we have a question in the Q&A. Will you be polling to gauge who or what department is doing academic advising in law schools, faculty, staff, some combination of both? This person is prescient because that was our next question.

So our next poll question, at your law school is the system for academic advising and support integrated across law school offices and departments, involving both faculty and professional staff? So our answers here were, yes, it is integrated; no, it's not integrated; or it's somewhat integrated. And if you want to, again, elaborate on this, please use the Q&A function to do so. And I think sort of along the lines that we suspected, only 13% of you are saying yes, this is really an integrated function. And I would love to hear from those of you who have that experience. The majority, 50% say no, and then 36% say it's somewhat integrated. We are going to get to, actually, go ahead, Jim. Why don't you ask the career advising question, and I'm going to take a look at our Q&A here.

Jim: Right, so we have a similar question. At your law school, is the system for career advising integrated across law school offices and departments, involving both faculty and professional staff? And the answers are the same, yes, no, or somewhat.

Susannah: Hmm, all right. Shaping up that, again, we see a difference between career and academic advising. There's less integration, more siloing with career advising. And you know, Jim and I were talking about this before we came on air, sometimes it's the case that faculty say, oh, well, that's not my job, right? Sure, okay. Other people are really enthusiastic about it. Maybe they feel time pressure. But I have heard from a number of faculty members, they feel like they're not qualified to give academic or career advice. And I think that's one of the key things, if you are a person who is in a position to orchestrate some sort of coordinated, integrated advising program, that you really provide everyone in the building, faculty and staff alike, with the tools that they can confidently advise students on the basics. We don't expect everyone to be an expert in career counseling or academic advising, but just making sure folks have that information so they can feel confident. And that might include some training and, I would say, ongoing training rather than just a one-time thing. Jim, I'm going to go to the Q&A here and toss some questions out at you. First, what strategies do you recommend for students who are high users of resources, particularly one-on-one advising in a variety of departments that are still struggling? At our school, we think of them as spinning their wheels, like they are spending time meeting with academic advisors and career

advisors and others, and they feel like that's enough because it's taking up their time, but they don't go implement the advice on their own time, any suggestions? Well, if you have a an answer to that question, you'll be a millionaire. What do you think about that?

Jim: I mean, there's a couple things. One is the career services office and the professionals there can't and won't be the best person for everyone to connect to, issues of personality and experience and whatever. So, A, in a perfect world, the career services office and the public interest office, if it's separate, and the internship and externship office and the clinical faculty and the doctrinal faculty and the dean of students and the office of alumni and development will all be sharing information about jobs and career development and career outcomes. And often, those things are just happening in such a siloed way that, you know, internships and externships may or may not be capitalized on in terms of leading to jobs.

I think a piece that goes with that is schools increasingly need sophisticated data systems so that they can track students across, have they had these fundamental development opportunities so that you can flag at-risk 2Ls and 3Ls through data rather than just through crisis counseling? But one of the developments I am seeing, and it goes to this idea that we have a much more diverse and, in some ways less, traditionally prepared group, is that we have to begin to borrow more heavily from coaching techniques. And often, that means, for these repeaters who are in our office once a week, that we need to work on developing individual career development plans where they have to make commitments, right? Before you can come see me again, you must do two information interviews, and you agree to do that. And then when you come back, we'll talk about that. But that's sort of, it is a little bit of tough love. You cannot let a few people suck all the energy.

And look, some of what these students lack is the ability to take responsibility for their own destiny and pathway here. And they lack that ability for lots of different reasons. But using some of those coaching techniques and practices to hold students accountable, you know, it's more than just work on your resume. What students, first-generation students, in particular, lack, is contact with professionals in the world, and they grow the most through that contact. And everyone in the building knows people they can put students in touch with, right? It's much easier to reach out and say, my torts professor recommended that I reach out to you, I'd love 15 minutes to talk about this. Someone I met in the alumni office said, you're interested in talking to students like me, could we do 15 minutes? And then holding students account, look, we've been spinning our wheels, I meet with you once a week. Before you come back, you need to agree you're going to do these two things, then we have something new to talk about.

So that is a super labor-intensive thing. You cannot just have the career services office doing that. It has to be understood that the whole school shares that responsibility to connect 2L and 3L students to lawyers in the real world in your community and to force them to have some of that interaction so that then the career services people can do

their job. And that requires leadership from the top. The dean has to signal to the faculty support for that philosophy and that shared responsibility, and it requires some training. Most faculty do not feel competent to have a career development conversation with a student. So it's not even so much always, it's not my job. It's like, I can't do that. I can teach torts, but I can't do that.

So, you know, I've worked with schools that have implemented a variety of things, including some lunch-and-learn programs for faculty where you do some models, some career development conversations, you give them a cheat sheet with half a dozen trigger questions that you might take up with a student who's sitting in your office that don't start with, you know, what law firm do you want to work for, or how much money do you want to make? But are more questions along that discernment pathway, right? So do you want to represent people or corporations? Are there particular communities that you want to represent? Do you want to work independently, or do you need to be part of a team? Like, really, students need to do that discernment journey to figure out what kind of work they want to do. Are there things in their background that have interested them and engaged them that they want to be able to bring into their legal career, whether it's arts or science or any number of other things? So the faculty don't have a job to get students a job, and sometimes that's why they're reluctant. They're like, Oh, my God, I can't give these students a job.

But helping them have those discernment conversations and suggesting next steps. And really, the most significant thing they can do is suggest one or two people in the community that they know that this student might reach out to. And not every faculty is going to have someone for every student, but that shared responsibility really does advance the ball. And everyone needs to be focused on the outcomes, right? The outcomes are more important than ever. Bar passage and career placement numbers are both weighed more heavily by US News now. Anything could happen, that could change. Students are scrutinizing those numbers. I mean, morally and ethically, it's the right thing to do, but strategically, it's also the right thing to do to maximize those numbers by engaging a broader cross-section of the community.

And critical to this is the dean and the associate deans signaling confidence in the career services office. Nothing undermines an effort more than a vibe that develops where students don't trust the career services office. So, I think they're not helpful, or, the word on the street is they're not getting me a job or they're not talking to me. And so that messaging from the top about the complete confidence and competence of our professional career team that comes from the dean and from the faculty, to not have faculty inadvertently undermining the confidence in the career team is critical, and none of that happens accidentally. Everybody in the law school's too busy to just do the right thing without some prompting and coaching and development.

Susannah: Yeah, that's a great point. I think, you know, it's the same idea that we all have to be rowing in the same direction, right? We all want our students to succeed, but

we have to support each other around that, staff supporting faculty, faculty supporting staff. Another question, this may be a silly question, it is not a silly question, but when you say academic advising, do you mean helping students choose courses and things of that nature? Or do you mean supporting students with law school skills, outlining exam prep, or both? So essentially, both. Academic advising, we typically think of as, you know, checking on those graduation requirements, asking students what courses they want to take, maybe mapping out a plan for them.

But again, with the emphasis on not siloing and sort of integration and a holistic approach to students, what I would ideally like to see, and I think Jim agrees with this, is an advising session that looks at the whole student, right? So you're going to look at what classes the student wants to take and what the graduation requirements are, but you're also going to prompt them to reflect a little bit on their academic performance to date and where they could improve and what's their plan for actually improving in those areas. So it's not a silly question because in my mind, they're very connected, but traditional academic advising is usually about course selection. I love this, my issue is sometimes enthusiasm is not enough and is dangerous when people advise from enthusiasm without expertise. This is really true. That coordination piece is so, so critical. There has to be training for faculty and for everyone who's going to be involved in academic and career advising. Gotta be rowing in the same direction, gotta be using the most up-to-date information that's out there about the best practices in career and academic advising.

Jim: Yeah, I think the head of the career office, I'll just take the career piece, has to have a presence in front of the faculty, and that's a confidence and a dialogue that develops over time. But helping faculty understand for 1L, 2L, and 3L cohorts, these are the developmental benchmarks that we're aiming at, this is the programming we're doing, this is where we lose people, this is how you have that conversation. Like, at the minimum, I think quarterly, kind of, updates that aren't just, these are our numbers, 97.6% of the class are employed in bar-passage-required or JD-advanced jobs. That's not sufficient. It's much more drawing the faculty in to understanding that developmental journey, where the soft spots are, where support is needed. And that means also opening your office to questions from faculty, and you've got questions from students all day long, and the last thing you want are faculty phone calls about how we do this. But that's the only way this works. That's a piece of this is being open to that interaction. And helping your other career counselors, if you're the head of the career office, finding ways for the other members of your team to build credibility and reputation in front of the faculty, as well as the students, so that it's not all on the head of the office, but that everyone on the team is respected as a professional counselor who can help both faculty and students do this stuff.

Susannah: Excellent, I agree 100% on the academic side of things and just in student services in general, I think that mutual respect is so, so critical. Good question here.

Susannah mentioned professionalism being a fraught term. We are struggling to, alternate term to describe what it means to act like a professional. Can you discuss that a bit? I hear you. And especially, I think this generation of students are very skeptical of all norms, which is wonderful on the one hand. On the other hand, you know, the practice of law is a very small-C conservative profession with very, very strict norms, and you disregard those norms at your peril, right? Jim, I'm going to toss this over to you because I don't have the answer yet, but yeah.

Jim: I mean, I'll say we've come a long way from soft skills, right? So professionalism is a better kind of language than talking about soft skills. But I think for some students, and particularly for this cohort of first-gen and gender-fluid and just diversity at the level our faculty have never seen before, one of the metaphors I find helpful in talking to students, one of the risks of professionalism is implying you're not professional and you have to learn this, you're not being professional, you have to learn this. So one of the metaphors I have found helpful in working with students is to approach it through the lens of theater and to say, look, these are roles that you need to learn to play. When you're in court with a judge, it's theater. And there are costumes, and there's makeup, and there are lines, and there are roles. And it doesn't define who you are, and when you go home at night, you're somebody else, you're yourself.

But to succeed in this profession, one of the things we all have to be able to do is play the right role at the right time with the right language and the right costume, and it doesn't define who we are. And it's something we can take off at the end of the day. That way of talking about these, so not, you're deficient in skills. You're learning a new set of acting skills here, and, like, all the TV lawyer shows showcase that, right? This is all theater, and I have found that can resonate, particularly if you're working with student affinity groups and other things, a presentation along those lines that talks about, look, this is a roleplay that we gotta learn, and we can practice it here in the law school. And then when you're done, take off that character and put it away, it's another avenue into having these conversations.

Susannah: I love that, Jim. I love the way you described it, and I think, you know, there's a lot of talk about authenticity, and I think authenticity is incredibly important, but that doesn't mean that there aren't proper roles for proper circumstances. Another way that I've approached this conversation with some of my most, you know, activist, non-conforming students is to talk about client centeredness. And that, you know, we don't do that enough in law school, right? Talk about that. The whole goal here is to serve clients, and when you serve a client, you want the judge or opposing counsel or the immigration officer focused on the client, focused on you. You want to be as neutral as possible in your role in that moment in time. And that means conforming to some of those norms of the profession, realizing that's not extinguishing your unique identity. But an excellent question, and I agree, a very fraught issue at this time that we need to approach creatively with this generation of students.

Faculty often have credentials and experience that is very different from our students. How can they advise them effectively, given that difference? So that crosses both the academic and the career dimensions of this. And I would say the first step is education. So just pointing out to faculty that there is a difference between their background and the background of their students. And I think that this is a great place for academic support professionals who work very intimately with students who might be underperforming can describe some of the stories they've seen, some of the challenges they've seen. Because all of us will tend to project assumptions onto another person that their experience and background is similar to our own, unless we have an affirmative reason to think otherwise. Jim, thoughts about that idea?

Jim: I mean, again, it's a difficult thing to sort of say out loud, but reminding faculty that they're not training faculty members, future law professors. And that yes, the student's background is different, and they're actually going to take jobs that are different than the ones you took, and they're going to make decisions that are different than yours, but that that's what we do. I mean, I guess, I think law schools that are really mission-driven, and so all law schools should be mission driven, the ABA standards require it. Mission statements and mission vary widely by school. But schools with tight missions that are commonly understood, whether it's a school that provides access or a school that feeds the public interest community or a school that feeds Big Law, as long as mission is understood and all of this is tied back to succeeding at that mission, again, leadership from the top in terms of messaging and support, the mission isn't producing more faculty members who are Harvard-Harvard or Yale-Harvard or Harvard-Yale. So you know, it's delicate. Every faculty member has competed to get where they are, and they've competed with a set of assumptions and understandings and credentials that they needed to succeed in what they're doing. Their students are on very different pathways. And so some of it is having that candid conversation once a year at a faculty retreat or the, you know, in August, before the students arrive, kind of the kickoff faculty meeting with key staff leaders. Faculty will come around. They actually care about success. They just need to be looped into all the markers for success that are important to the school and to the leadership team.

Susannah: Well, and I think that's a great point, too, that we have our own experiential bias, you know, in our respective position. So to me, it's so obvious that students, you know, for example, might not be able to actually read critically. But if a faculty member has a different point of interface with a student and it's only, you know, based on a final exam, they might not have that insight. And so sharing those insights and those experiences is really key. Question for you, Jim. Has there been success with student ambassador programs and career services in getting students engaged with office and advisors? Have you heard of anything like that?

Jim: Yes, I've worked with a couple schools who have very successful student ambassador programs, and I've also seen student ambassador programs that sort of

belly-flop. And, you know, it's hard to say, this is the exact recipe for success, but certainly, I think using 3L students, and some schools use a 2L, 3L, so it's a two-year appointment and they can kind of learn from the 3Ls, I think training the ambassadors is key. I think having a set of expectations about, I mean, they're in a good position with their peers to hold them accountable for things like information interviewing, particularly when they can say, this is what I did in this work, you should do this. You all know, in the career services office, one of the greatest risks is bad information. Students, you know, only have their own experience. Student orgs and others, students often perpetuate bad information.

The system changes year to year. 1Ls are new every year, and there's a new system. I think having an incredibly diverse group, I think signaling the confidence you have in that team, and then making them visible. So the one school I'm thinking of that did this particularly well, the ambassadors had office hours in an open part of the law school, in a communal space, and they were regularly staffed, and there was a sign, and it was a drop-in kind of thing, and they were visible. And then those students have to know, as everyone does, what are the next steps? What's a referral? Is this a student in crisis? Is this a student who's just lazy and can't get off the stick? Like, what am I actually dealing with? And students can get in over their head very quickly, so making sure they have the training to know when to refer back to the, you know, you really need to talk to a career counselor about this, I'm not qualified to talk about this omission on your resume with you. I mean, one of the things, we haven't talked about this at all, but both in academic advising and career advising, one of the newer burdens is the number of students who present in those offices in crisis. And the underlying issue is mental health or emotional or financial as opposed to academic or career discernment. And so lots of our professionals in the law school are doing, you know, mental health first-aid and crisis intervention. And so making sure everyone, including your student ambassadors, if you use them, understand all the resources at the university and the law school, understand the importance of referring people who are in crisis and discerning between someone who's in crisis and that's why they're not succeeding, as opposed to someone who has some other developmental issue or behavioral procrastination going on.

Susannah: Great. Great, great points. Faculty get to say they aren't qualified to career counsel, but career counselors are qualified to academic counsel. I'll just deal with that very briefly. Again, it's not about people being experts in everything because that's not realistic, but having questions that you pose to the students that either prompt them to reflect on their development, academically and career-wise, or to seek out those additional resources. And honestly, just having a relationship is so, so important to student development and their development of a sense of self-efficacy. Do you know of any good examples of PD benchmarks for each class year of law student or milestone models that fit for law students?

Jim: I mean, that's really an important question, and it's really dependent on each school. I mean, one of the things I do when I'm working with a school with my consultant hat on is to go through those developmental benchmarks. So for instance, if you're a law school that has a robust alumni network that does either information interviewing or speed interviewing or speed networking events, you know, so you have your 1Ls, they have to have the resume meeting, they have to a couple group meetings, and they have to have a one-on-one meeting with a career counselor who's assigned to them. But being able to figure out, for our law school, what are the benchmarks, right? And they include things beyond career services, so the experiential learning, right? If you have a robust internship, externship program, making sure students take advantage of those opportunities and understand the linkages with the job market and also having a data system that shows, all right, well, here's 40 3Ls who never had any externship, internship, or clinical work, and they met all their experiential learning obligations through simulation classes in the classroom. Like, that data that shifts, you know, just building, and so 12twenty and Symplicity are increasingly building out tabs and templates for schools to be able to draw some of that data in so that you know, it's different for every school because every school has a different curriculum and different resources.

Not everybody has a robust alumni network. But again, really that coaching thing in, like, as 2Ls, if you don't have a job, being sure that there is a system for requiring some kind of ongoing information interviewing and getting credit for that. So some schools pair this with all kinds of didactic learning, lectures, some for credit, some not credit, but having a way of tracking attendance at those, again, not to punish students for not participating, but so that there's data that shows these are the at-risk students, they didn't come to this session, they didn't do this in the 2L year, they didn't go to the 2L kickoff, they didn't report having a 1L summer job. And it's not a complicated process, but every school needs to sit down and say, what are the benchmarks that we feel are important that we would like, that we feel like we have the capacity to track from a data perspective and report out on? And then to implement that. And that's one of the things that we work with schools when we're trying to think that through.

Susannah: Yeah, absolutely, and so I want to make a couple of points about data. Sometimes I think we are unrealistically fixated on data, but we know that data persuades, right? And data is very, very useful. It just has to be, you know, presented and considered appropriately. Data collection and analysis cannot just be layered on top of existing full-time jobs. So again, you know, have your dean as your ally in this. Come up with a data strategy, and then you need a position, you need a person who is the czar of the data, both in terms of making sure it's input and it's analyzed and that it's reported on. It is not, you know, without costs, but it's definitely worth the effort. And I would say the same thing, Jim, in our consulting engagements, we just hear that over and over again. Can we get some data? Can we get some data? Can we get some

data? So maybe you're the person at your school who will become the chief strategist on those data issues.

Jim: In a perfect world, there's a data guru at the law school who's available across departments to help build some of this and is a point person for ABA 509 reporting. And, you know, that isn't available at every law school, but in a perfect world, there's someone outside the career office who is the data partner who can help build out these structures. And they're not necessarily going to think through the content, but they're going to support the data collection and the filtering and the report writing so that you can use that data. I mean, all the data in the world isn't useful if you can't use it to screen certain kinds of students. And in a perfect world, when somebody sits down a counseling meeting with a student, a 2L or a 3L, they're able to bring all that up quickly in the student record to see it so they have the backstory, at least in part, before they have those difficult conversations.

Susannah: Yes, it's a really powerful tool, for that circumstance, in particular. There's so many wonderful questions. I'm guessing we're not going to get to them all, but I'm going to keep plowing away. I'm the assistant dean of a combined office of student and career services, previously the Office of Student Affairs and the Career Development Office. These offices were combined two years ago, and we are still working on effective and efficient structure. This seems to be a slowly growing trend among law schools. Is there a sense or official data of how many law schools now have combined departments or take a clearly holistic approach to student support?

Jim: There's no data, so we can let that go, we just talked about data, on this question. It is a slowly growing trend, and I would say it's a handful of schools who've tried this. It's not the only way to provide a holistic approach to this. Most schools still have discrete career services offices, whatever they call them. And there are lots of variables. You know, is public interest separate or is it part of it? Is it serving non JD students, as well as JD students? You know, are counselors assigned to people? Do people see everybody? There's lots of organizational variables, as you all know, on how you set up the career services office. But the integration with student services is not, I mean, I wouldn't go so far as to say it's trending, and I think so many offices of student affairs are really focused on crisis counseling and saving people's lives and accommodations that it's hard in terms of capacity. I mean, bravo to you guys for doing that, and if you want to write an article about how that's going, the industry's super interested in that experiment, but it's not a dominant trope right now.

Susannah: Okay, and I'm going to keep going with these questions, Jim, if that's all right with you, because I think that's the most-

Jim: Yeah, we can go right to time.

Susannah: Okay, the thing that I've come up against is that faculty thinks that law school and the bar exam is the same that it was when they sat 10, 20 or more years ago, which isn't true. Part of what I'm trying to share with them is about how things have changed from when they were in school or took the exam and what our students are facing now so that we can set them up for success. And this comes back-

Jim: Cue the next gen bar exam, Susannah.

Susannah: Yeah, yeah. This really comes back to conversations and information, right? So, you know, which is to say, I think Jim alluded to this earlier, but the idea that your student services folks, all the student services office are talking to the faculty at faculty meetings, presenting information, but also strategy, you know, ideas for how to best help students. As Jim mentioned, the next-gen bar exam is a perfect example of an opportunity to talk to faculty, in very detailed ways, about how different the bar exam is today from when they took it even 10 years ago, 20 years ago. And I've found in working with schools on familiarizing faculty with next-gen bar, putting actual questions in front of them and deconstructing those questions really makes the light bulbs go off in terms of how what our students are facing is different. I think you need to talk about financial burdens. I think you need to talk about childcare and elder care burdens. I think you need to talk about food insecurity. Again, if faculty haven't heard about these things, they're not going to understand the myriad pressures that our students are are facing today. Can you suggest ways to help ensure the cross-faculty staff conversations don't devolve into inappropriate, but juicy gossip? I feel like there's a backstory behind this question that I want to know more about, but Jim, did you have any thoughts about that or insight into what our questioner is talking about?

Jim: I mean, again, I think it's the leadership from the very top in terms of setting the tone for those conversations and kind of a zero tolerance policy for disrespect on either side of the aisle. Look, law schools are a little Petri dishes where a bunch of people are locked in a room together, and all kinds of wacky things are going to happen, and there's intense personalities, but that constant leadership returning us to the mission at hand and keeping the team focused on our shared goals and remembering and reminding that we are modeling, for all our students, professionalism and professional behavior with one another and with them. And that, you know, faculty have tremendous autonomy in American legal education and in American higher education, in general. And therefore, faculty members, like partners in law firms, will occasionally behave badly, and that bad behavior is often tolerated.

But a community that has strong leadership and is mission-driven develops a consensus that that's bad behavior and isolates it, as opposed to letting that bad behavior drag the conversation down, devolve into chaos, devolve into pettiness, devolve into fingerpointing or gossip. It's not easy, and look, we have evermore deans who are baby deans and it's their first deanship, and there is no harder job, there is, you could be running for elected office, but there is no harder job than running a law school

these days. It's an extraordinarily difficult job. And often, we have very young deans in those roles, so they sometimes need coaching and support from you and from others to be able to step up into that leadership role and messaging for the community. It doesn't come naturally. Most of them have come, as you know, from the faculty, and their teaching and training has been all focused on scholarship and teaching and service and not leadership, and it's a whole separate set of skills.

Susannah: Yeah, and not to plug us too much here, but one of the things that LAC does, we have a lot of former deans, very experienced deans on our roster who can be guides for new deans if they're open to receiving that type of guidance. Okay, I think this is our last question. Similar to the student ambassador question, can you talk about success challenges of using peer tutors, teaching fellows, and academic success programs? I could go on about this for a couple of hours, at least. My view, not everyone shares this view, is that peer tutoring can serve a kind of community-building function, but it's not an effective tool for academic intervention. The students who are successful, such that they're qualified to be peer tutors, are not necessarily going to be able to relate to the students who are having academic struggles. You know, there's a social visibility aspect to peer tutoring. And the students who have completed two or almost three years of law school just don't have enough experience with struggling students under their belt to really be able to assist them in that situation. And if you want to, we'll throw our emails up in a minute here, but if you want to talk to me more about that, I'd be happy to. It is a really big topic. And I think, Jim, what we're going to do is actually, and Bo, behind the scenes, is put up our poll question number eight, our final question for you all, which is a, you know, free-response question. What is the biggest barrier to providing effective academic and career advising to students at your school? If you have a chance to answer this question, that would be incredibly helpful to us to understand the types of challenges that you all are facing and how we might be able to help with that. And Jim, while they're doing that, do you have any closing words for our guests out there?

Jim: Just that, you know, we are your partners in this, and one of the great things about LSAC still is that it is a nonprofit, and it's a member organization. And one of our, you know, goals has been to build out a team of experts that can help our member law schools solve these problems. And we're not in it, you know, to make money or compete with the private sector. It really is another way to be of service to law schools. So always reach out, you know, whether it's career services or academic support or mapping the curriculum for the next-generation bar exam or old-fashioned enrollment management and financial aid optimization. Like, all of those are areas where we have a roster of experts who have different experience. And for me, personally, I'll just say it's a real pleasure, at this point in my career, to be able to help law schools solve problems, and that's really what we're trying to do. So if we can ever be of service to you as you think through the changes that are happening in legal education, in the student population that's going to law school, we're happy to just have a conversation

and see if the problem you're experiencing is something we think we can be useful to helping you solve.

Susannah: Absolutely, great, and my colleague Bo is behind the scenes, and Bo, I forgot how we were going to share our email addresses with the audience here. It looks like, okay, great.

Jim: There we go.

Susannah: Up on the screen for you all. So again, feel free to reach out with any questions. We're always happy to speak with you. We will be following this up with a blog post, and we will try to address the questions that we didn't have time for, share, that Jim was talking about. Thank you so much for coming today. Jim, it's always lovely to present with you, and I hope you all have a great rest of the day, bye-bye.

Jim: It was a real pleasure. Thank you.

Announcer: Contact us, Susannah Pollvogt, S-P-O-L-L-V-O-G-T@lsac.org. Jim Leipold at J-L-E-I-P-O-L-D@lsac.org.

[On screen text reads, "Contact us Susannah Pollvogt spollvogt@lsac.org, Jim Leipold jleipold@lsac.org"]

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