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Message from the President

Cam Ferenbach, State Bar of Nevada President



BRIDGING THE GAP

“With the supply of new admittees exceeding the availability of jobs, effective training pursuant to Rule 214 is becoming more critical.”

A recent article in *Slate* magazine was titled, “A Case of Supply v. Demand, Law schools are manufacturing more lawyers than America needs, and law students aren’t happy.” That article can be found at: <http://www.slate.com/id/2272621/>.

The article reports that the number of people employed in legal services reached an all-time high of 1.196 million in June 2007, and then decreased by nearly 8 percent to 1.103 million in October 2010. During that same period, the total number of jobs in the United States fell by 5.4 percent.

The supply side of the equation has not stopped growing. Between 2007 and 2009, the number of LSAT takers increased 20.5 percent, and 43,588 JDs were awarded in 2010, an 11.5 percent increase from 2000.

The Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, Arizona State University, recently published the “Findings and Recommendations of the National Forum on the Future of Legal Education.” Here’s a link to that report: <http://www.law.asu.edu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=MG19u6zejQo%3d&tabid=1983>.

Last year, the forum gathered more than a hundred leading lawyers and judges from around the country to discuss how legal education could be improved. There were no pre-arranged panels of experts. Instead the forum held breakout sessions on the first day. On the second day, a real-time interactive computer feedback session allowed all participants to vote and comment on suggestions raised during the first day’s sessions.

One question presented was, “How can we better bridge the gap from law school to practice, beyond simply expanding clinics and skills training?”

Forum participants concluded:

1. Good legal skills are not enough. New lawyers also need to understand what it means to work in a law firm environment and have good business development skills, including time management, business acumen, leadership qualities, substantive knowledge, client business development skills and community involvement.

2. Law schools should bring law firms that have excellent training programs into the law schools to conduct trainings.
3. Law students should be assigned a mentor for all three years. Mentors should be practicing lawyers and judges.

Supreme Court Rule 214 requires that, “each active member of the state bar, within the first year following the successful completion of the Nevada state bar examination, shall complete the Introduction to Nevada Practice and Procedure program.” The State Bar of Nevada presents this program every year and calls it “Bridge the Gap.”

Over the last few years, we have recognized that the long-standing lecture format, relying on volunteer attorneys and judges, was not providing an effective introduction to Nevada practice and procedure. Also, attendees’ feedback forms requested content more in line with the skills described in forum recommendation number 1, above.

With the supply of new admittees exceeding the availability of jobs, effective training pursuant to Rule 214 is becoming more critical. Law firms, which have traditionally helped recent law grads bridge the gap, are hiring fewer new admittees. When openings appear, many firms are hiring more experienced lawyers who are also applying for associate positions. Our profession is losing the benefits of training and mentoring by law firms, identified in items 2 and 3 above.

Perceiving a need to improve the state bar’s Bridge the Gap Program, we are making plans to incorporate a mentor program into Rule 214. The mentor program combines seminar and one-on-one mentorship learning platforms. We are modifying what we see as the best elements of successful ongoing programs in Georgia and Utah, and plan to have a pilot program in place in early 2012. Programs such as these depend on major support by experienced members who volunteer to be mentors.

Given the strong history of Nevada attorneys generously devoting time to bar committees and sections, we are confident that this program will attract many of you to help. Bars who have pioneered mentoring programs report that the vast majority of volunteer mentors derive significant personal satisfaction from their participation. Please contact me at camf@nvbar.org or State Bar of Nevada Executive Director Kim Farmer at (702) 382-2200 if you have any questions or suggestions regarding this program. ■



THE MENTOR PROGRAM

The state bar has proposed a mentor program to take the place of the current Nevada Practice and Procedure program (commonly referred to as Bridge the Gap) required by Supreme Court Rule 214. The mentor program will match new admittees with mentors (pre-qualified bar members in good standing) who are in the same area of practice. All approved mentors will be appointed by the Nevada Supreme Court. The mentor recruiting process for the pilot programs begins this month.

As proposed, a pilot version of the mentor program will consist of a combination of CLE programming, one-on-one mentor meetings and experiential fieldtrips. The goal is to conduct a pilot, which will be rolled out in 2012.

The proposed mentor program is being developed in order to provide transitional support to newly admitted attorneys to the State Bar of Nevada into practice. This program will not focus on providing substantive advice or training in the practice of law; rather, the goals of this program will be:

- To assist new lawyers in acquiring the practical skills and judgment necessary to practice in a highly competent manner in the state of Nevada;
- To sharpen and enhance the practical skills necessary to compete in today’s legal environment;
- To match new lawyers with more experienced lawyers for training during their first year of practice in professionalism, ethics, and civility;
- To provide support, foster relationships and create networking opportunities for newly admitted members; and
- To provide a means for all Nevada attorneys to learn the importance of organizational mentoring, including the building of developmental networks and long-term mentoring relationships.

The pilot mentor program will combine seminar and one-on-one mentorship learning platforms, and will be designed to accommodate every attorney admitted to practice law in the state of Nevada. In order to address the varying needs of new lawyers and experienced attorneys alike, the mentor program will have two separate programming tracks.

The pilot program will commence with a half-day seminar where mentors and new lawyers gather for a program orientation followed by an introduction to policy and procedure in Nevada. The seminar will also aid in cultivating a relationship between the new lawyers and mentors while they begin fulfilling the requirements of the program. To learn more about the proposed mentor program and the mentor application process, please visit the website at www.nvbar.org/mentorprogram. ■