

Law Students of the Year:
25 who are serving their communities

Best schools for Big Law

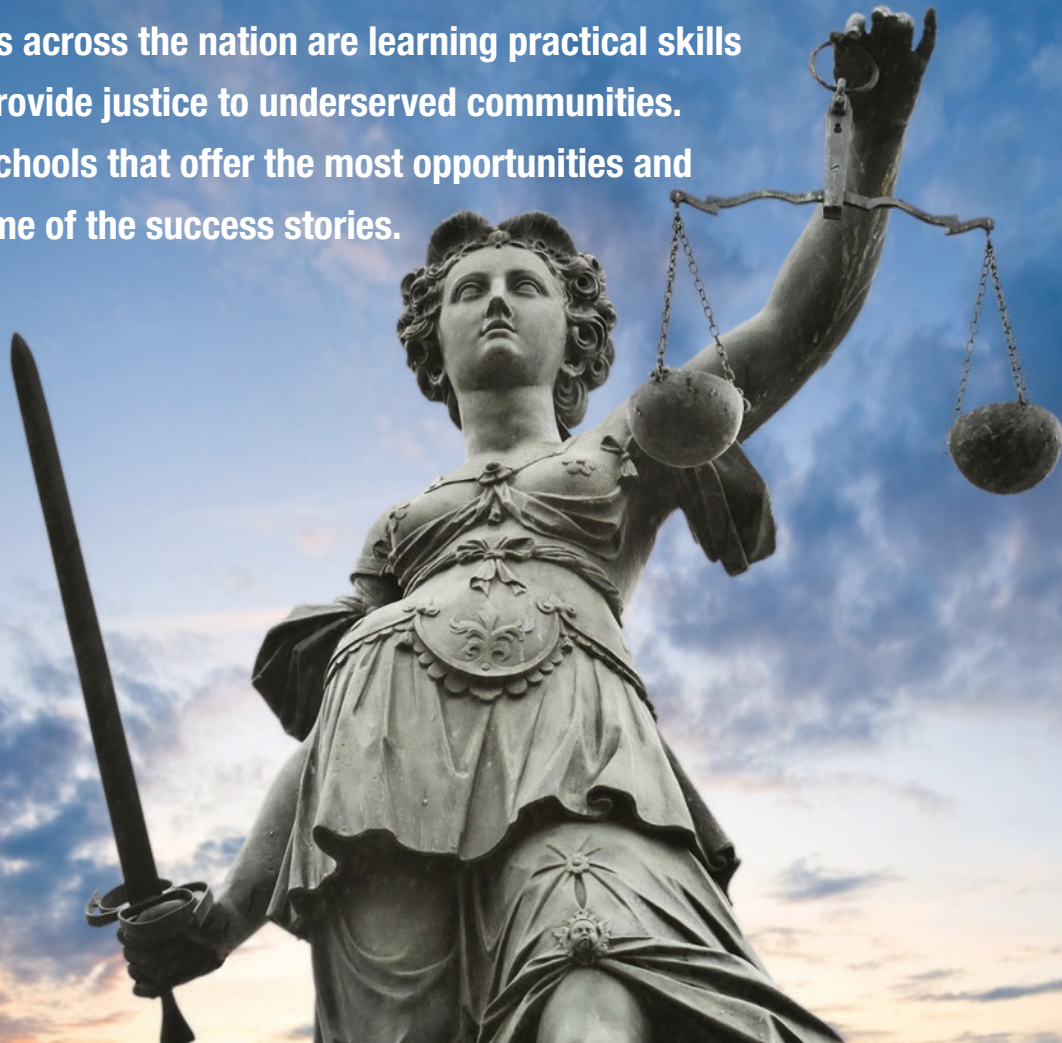
the National Jurist

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BEST SCHOOLS for Practical Training

Law students across the nation are learning practical skills by helping provide justice to underserved communities. We list the schools that offer the most opportunities and highlight some of the success stories.



BEST SCHOOLS

for

PRACTICAL TRAINING

Real lawyering is one of the ultimate experiences for law students. We list the schools that offer the best practical training and highlight some of the success stories it produces.

By Mike Stetz

Michael LaGarde traveled to the prisons and heard the stories firsthand. Men describing how they were cooped up in tiny cells. How they never saw the sunshine. Never felt a breeze. For years upon years ...

“It was unfathomable,” said the University of Denver Sturm College of Law student who took part in the school’s Civil Rights Clinic, which filed a class-action lawsuit against the Colorado Department of Corrections.

The suit concerned the Colorado State Penitentiary, a so-called supermax prison, where some prisoners are in lockdown for up to 23 hours a day.

In December, after years of legal sparring, the corrections department agreed to

Casey Shea, Professor Lindsey Webb and Michael LaGarde of the University of Denver will forever remember their roles in a class-action suit against a Colorado prison, where some inmates never saw the light of day.



PHOTO BY JAIMIE AGUILAR

TOP 25 LAW SCHOOLS

	Law school	Ratio of simulation positions	Ratio of clinic positions	Ratio of field placements	Ratio of inter-school skills competitions	Grade
1	Northeastern University	0.63	0.30	1.46	0.07	A+
2	University of St. Thomas - Mn.	1.31		1.51	0.10	A+
3	Yale Law School	0.29	1.65	0.10	0.24	A+
4	UC - Irvine	0.42	1.06	0.38	0.02	A+
5	Washington and Lee University	2.31	0.45	0.34	0.14	A+
6	University of Wisconsin	0.68	0.99	0.32	0.22	A+
7	University of Arizona	1.54	0.67	0.41	0.25	A+
8	Brigham Young University	1.44	0.33	0.71	0.14	A+
9	University of Denver	1.20	0.33	0.51	0.17	A+
10	Pepperdine University	2.43	0.30	0.38	0.14	A+
11	University of Colorado	1.02	0.58	0.31	0.35	A+
12	UMKC School of Law	1.22	0.55	0.28	0.12	A
13	University of Utah	1.44	0.16	0.66	0.14	A
14	Northwestern Law	1.57	0.66	0.32	0.06	A
15	Case Western University	1.65	0.35	0.29	0.19	A
16	Brooklyn Law School	1.10	0.51	0.48	0.10	A-
17	University of Wyoming	0.52	0.63	0.36	0.28	A-
18	Mitchell Hamline	0.88	0.34	0.30	0.12	A-
19	University of Mississippi	1.50	0.43	0.25	0.20	A-
20	Golden Gate University	0.98	0.48	0.35	0.07	A-
21	University of Kansas	0.62	0.52	0.45	0.22	A-
22	Liberty University School of Law	2.13	0.15	0.23	0.33	A-
23	University of New Hampshire	1.75	0.28	0.41	0.18	A-
24	Cardozo School of Law	1.01	0.33	0.49	0.11	A-
25	Drake University	1.04	0.53	0.32	0.20	A-

spend \$4.7 million to build outdoor recreational facilities at the prison. It's believed to be the only prison in the nation that did not provide some sort of outdoor exercise. That means the men will soon feel a bit more human, a bit more alive.

"It was the most meaningful thing I've ever done," said LaGarde, a Class of 2016 student. "It's what I'll remember most from my law school experience."

Annually, The National Jurist honors those schools that go above and beyond in preparing law students for the real world in our ranking of Best Law Schools for Practical Training.

We look at a number of factors, including which schools have the greatest percentage of students in clinics, externships and simulation courses. We also look at the most robust moot court options. (See page 26 to see how we determined the rankings.)

However, this year, we also wanted to showcase how these programs do more than just get students out of sterile classrooms and away from their favorite Starbucks.

Many schools have been adding practical training programs in the face of criticism that they were failing to prepare law students for jobs. However, arguably, there have been other benefits from the increase in such programs.

People are being helped, and students are learning how rewarding it is to help others. Many are learning they have more power than they imagined.

Casey Shea is another third-year University of Denver student who participated in the Civil Rights Clinic fight to improve prison conditions. Her school — which gives students the opportunity to take up to 30 credits of experiential learning — finished 9th on this year's list, making it one of 11 schools to earn an A+.

"It was a great way to see a huge problem get resolved," she said.

She also visited prisons to interview inmates.

"Hearing someone tell you what it's like not to see the sun for months ... You don't get that in the classroom," Shea said.

She was not intimidated by the stark, harsh settings. The barbed wire. The security.

"At the end of the day, you're sitting in a room with someone who has a problem," Shea said. "And you're there to help solve the problem."

To do such work, she said, is, "Why I went to law school."

Practical training? Why, it can be downright magical, said Laura Rovner, who directs University of Denver's clinical programs.

"It changes [the students] in amazing, amazing ways," she said.

The best part of her job is to see students undergo this transformation, she said. They are out of the classroom and finally putting the knowledge they've gained to work.

"They're incredibly energized," she said.

And it's invaluable to their futures as lawyers, she added.

"Who wants to have a heart surgeon operate who's never touched a person before?"

The recent victory over the Colorado prison system was no overnight success. It was the culmination of years of work by the clinic and the advocacy organization Civil

Rights Education and Enforcement Center. The students coming in know this can be a long slog, Rovner said. They fight the good fight and then hand it off to the next group of students.

However, the work resonates long after they leave. When the recent settlement was announced, Rovner got emails from former students who worked on the case, telling her how rewarding it was to hear the news.

The students also learn a lot about themselves. They may have preconceived notions about prison, about inmates, about whether they deserve sympathy or help.

Troy Anderson was one of the men they fought for. Mentally ill, he was serving time in the Colorado State Penitentiary for a number of crimes, including a shoot-out with police. For 12 years, he was housed in solitary confinement in a cell with no fresh air. He spent 23 hours a day in it. His only respites were showers or when he was taken

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to another cell for an hour of exercise. It had a narrow grate, that's all. Some days he didn't leave his cell at all.

In 2012, a judge ruled his confinement was cruel and unusual punishment. "The Eighth Amendment does not mandate comfortable prisons," U.S. District Judge Brooke Jackson wrote in his ruling. "But it does forbid inhumane conditions."

However, the prison system moved Anderson to another facility rather than improve the conditions. That prompted the class action suit that led to the settlement.

Lindsey Webb is the faculty supervisor for this particular case. The students worked tirelessly on it, she said. They traveled to prisons and interviewed dozens upon dozens of inmates. They did research. They wrote the complaint. They appeared in court. "They did everything you would expect a lawyer to do on a case," she said.

It took nearly three years of work, she said. As many as 10 students took part. Working with them was nothing short of exhilarating, she said. "They poured their energy and lives into this."

Practical training is pivotal, she said. "It not only helps them become lawyers, it helps they realize what kind of lawyers they want to be."

Who's No. 1

Northeastern University School of Law in Boston topped our list for the second year. It's well-known Cooperative Legal Education Program gives students four

Law school	Ratio of simulation positions	Ratio of clinic positions	Ratio of field placements	Ratio of inter-school skills competitions
Arizona State University	0.66	0.34	0.50	0.09
Baylor University	2.25	0.00	0.23	0.25
Campbell Law School	1.56	0.18	0.33	0.29
Chicago-Kent College of Law	1.52	0.34	0.23	0.11
CUNY School of Law	0.90	0.54	0.10	0.10
Duke University	1.29	0.34	0.10	0.56
Elon University	1.16	0.25	0.31	0.12
Emory University	1.60	0.20	0.42	0.11
Florida Coastal School of Law	1.14	0.31	0.29	0.19
Gonzaga University	0.63	0.54	0.30	0.12
Lewis & Clark Law School	0.50	0.33	0.51	0.07
Loyola University Chicago	1.24	0.30	0.27	0.10
New York Law School	0.88	0.36	0.19	0.18
Pacific McGeorge School of Law	1.27	0.32	0.33	0.15
Saint Louis University	1.68	0.30	0.29	0.08
Southern Illinois University	0.99	0.26	0.36	0.14
Syracuse University	1.09	0.46	0.28	0.14
Temple University	0.90	0.28	0.37	0.06
University of Cincinnati	1.03	0.25	0.32	0.26
University of Georgia	0.99	0.28	0.44	0.12
University of Hawaii	0.23	0.62	0.33	0.16
University of Illinois	1.20	0.24	0.54	0.17
University of Maryland	1.05	0.41	0.27	0.17
University of Minnesota	0.92	0.41	0.31	0.04
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	1.06	0.35	0.27	0.10
University of San Francisco	1.41	0.26	0.31	0.08
University of Tennessee	1.58	0.54	0.12	0.14
University of the District of Columbia	0.38	0.81	0.05	0.03
University of Washington	0.96	0.48	0.32	0.17
Vermont Law School	1.07	0.47	0.28	0.08
Whittier Law School	2.10	0.09	0.31	0.09
William & Mary Law School	0.52	0.40	0.42	0.19



quarters of full-time legal employment.

Chelsea Brisbois, a third-year, is an example of someone who's been changed by the experience. She's done several internships and spent last summer working for DNA People's Legal Services in the

Chelsea Brisbois helped Native Americans navigate a wide range of legal issues last summer.

Southwest, helping those who live in the Navajo Nation.

That was a fellowship provided by the school's Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy. She was drawn to the program because she's Native American and had never been in that part of the country.

She was taken aback by how Native Americans were often targets of predatory loan practices. In border towns, one can find car dealerships, payday lenders and

rent-to-own furniture dealers, she said.

“Some of the elders don’t speak English,” she said. “The businesses don’t care. There are no interpreters. They just want to get them to sign documents.”

Car dealerships will drive new, shiny cars through the reservation to lure the people to buy, she said.

How predatory are they? She was involved in a case dealing with the actions of one particular car dealership. To build up evidence, members of the legal clinic spoke to an 80-year-old Navajo woman who had purchased a truck from the business and had sought legal help.

She had no driver’s license. She had a small income, one that would hardly qualify her for such a vehicle. However, the car dealership falsified her income on the credit application so she could get a loan.

Brisbois remembers going to meet her with other members of the legal clinic. The woman had no phone, so they tracked her down by going to a senior center and asking for directions. Her home was tiny. She had no air-conditioning.

The legal clinic helped her out of her jam, but that case is hardly unusual, Brisbois said.

Practical training experience shifted Brisbois’ career goals. She once wanted to be a family law attorney. Now she’s going into public interest. She’s currently serving another internship with the Washington State Attorney General’s Office. It has offered her a job when she graduates.

“Being exposed to these injustices got me interested in helping the disadvantaged,” she said.

Such success stories are hardly unusual. Students in practical training have done the remarkable. They have helped free the innocent. They have reduced tax bills for the poor. They have helped start-ups navi-

gate complex business legalities.

Take Northwestern Pritzker School of Law in Chicago, ranked 14th on our list. Its Center on Wrongful Convictions of Youth helped vacate a man’s murder and attempted rape convictions last year.

Daniel Andersen had been convicted of those crimes in 1980. He was freed in 2007 after serving more than 27 years of a 55-year sentence. However, he still had to register as a sex offender and had trouble rebuilding his life. He was, after all, branded a murderer.

But DNA tests showed that the knife police believed was used to kill 20-year-old Cathy Trunko could not have been the murder weapon. Neither Andersen’s blood nor the victim’s blood was on it.

The judge noted: “The knife was the lynchpin of the state’s case against Dan; without it, there is absolutely no physical evidence linking Dan to this crime.”

Andersen, 19 at the time of the murder, had confessed to the crime after 16 hours of police interrogation.

University of California Irvine School of Law’s Intellectual Property, Arts and Technology Clinic recently helped filmmakers get access to resources vital to their projects. That school is fourth in our ranking, receiving an A+.

Encrypted content from DVDs, Blu-ray discs and digitally transmitted video were off limits to documentary filmmakers under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). Filmmakers considered that unfair and potentially crippling to their work, since they had the right to other copyrighted materials.

The Library of Congress recently allowed exemptions to allow their use, thanks to the clinic’s work.

“Authors and filmmakers alike need to access copyrighted content in order to make fair use, but the DMCA had been unfairly restricting their ability to do so,” said Jack Lerner, director of the clinic, in a school news release. “This new exemption goes a long way toward rectifying the problem.”

More? Oh, there’s more.

The Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School, which finished third on our list and earned an A+, helped win a big victory last year for Vietnam-era vets. That clinic participated in a class action suit to upgrade the status of combat vets who had received “less than honorable” discharges.

How we did the rankings

The rankings are based on experiential learning opportunities, with data from the American Bar Association and individual law schools. We looked at five categories: Clinics, Externships, Simulation courses, Interschool competitions and other.

We placed the most weight on clinical experience, at 38 percent. Experts say it is a particularly effective practical training tool. Students, under faculty direction, work with clients in a number of legal areas. The score was based on the number of clinical positions filled compared to the number of second- and third-year students enrolled at the school in the same year. We obtained all data from the ABA.

Externships — at 24 percent — were given second highest weight. Students get experience by working in prosecutor offices, government agencies and nonprofits, to name but a few. They get hands-on training from working with attorneys and judges. The score was based on the number of positions filled compared to the number of students enrolled at the school in the same year. We obtained data from the ABA.

Simulations accounted for 21 percent. This method seems to be growing more popular as schools seek to promote lawyering skills in classroom settings. It’s effective and less expensive, experts say. The score was based on the number of positions filled compared to the number of students enrolled at the school in the same year. We obtained data from the ABA.

Interschool competitions account for 5 percent. The score was based on the number of students that participated compared to the number of students enrolled at the school in the same year. We obtained data from the ABA.

We asked schools to provide information about additional offerings that are not reflected in these numbers, and this accounted for the final 10 percent of the study. For example, schools requiring pro bono work were awarded points for those efforts.

They had gotten such discharges before post traumatic stress disorder became a medical diagnosis, which didn’t happen until 1980. Because they were suffering with PTSD at the time, they couldn’t perform their military duties as well and hence got “bad paper” discharges.

Daniel Andersen’s murder conviction was overturned thanks in part to the work of law students from Northwestern University.

