

## **Statement on the Value of a Legal Education**

*This statement was developed by the Deans Steering Committee of the Association of American Law Schools. It is offered as a resource and, where appropriate, as a point of discussion to those interested in legal education.*

Law schools are the guardians, cultivators, and transmitters of a body of knowledge and experience that is critical to the wellbeing and structure of American society. They are the setting for a transformative experience in which students engage with a challenging intellectual tradition that teaches them to question their assumptions and learn how to be creative problem-solvers. Law school empowers students to become agents of change because it teaches students about the legal system of the United States, a system that has the seeds of change built into its structure.

Civil society and its progress begin with the rule of law. The rule of law is the foundation of our society, our political system, and our economic system. It is also a principle that has a history and meaning that must be understood, continually developed, and passed on to the next generation. Law schools have always been the places where students learn about the rule of law by learning about the history of the law and about the United States Constitution and the body of law it has created. This body of law continues to produce the fundamental principles on which all other law in the United States is based. It also produces the structure of our legal system and the conditions under which this system flourishes.

Every important issue that our society, and all societies, are facing at this time in history has important legal aspects to it, whether it is global conflict, food safety and security, civil unrest, human rights, public health, the role of technology and the internet, environmental issues, corporate governance, government accountability, or the migration of populations. Regardless of the root of the problems or the variety of possible solutions, the law, and lawyers, will have a crucial role to play.

Sometimes lawyers need to use the law in order to ensure protection of an otherwise powerless person or group; sometimes they seek to change the law to improve our society and increase prosperity. Every day lawyers use their problem-solving skills to help individuals and organizations resolve conflicts, plan their affairs, and reach their goals.

The primary role of law professors is to teach the next generation of lawyers to think critically about problems, to understand the structure and power of law in our society, and to be thoughtful and engaged with respect to solutions. This is accomplished through traditional classroom and clinical teaching; engagement with the community, the bench, and the bar; pro bono work; and research and scholarship, in which faculty explore, question, and test the boundaries of the law

This broad-based knowledge of the law, its role in our society, and these critical thinking and problem-solving skills give the holders of this knowledge both an understanding of public and private legal structures and the skills to address individual problems in an analytical and rational way. Legal education also trains students in a variety of problem-solving skills that can be utilized in situations within and outside of the practice of law. No other professional training imparts this combination of knowledge and skills and empowers its holders to use them in myriad ways, from defending the rights of the marginalized and downtrodden, to running a multinational corporation; from working for law reform and policy, to continually striving to understand the meaning and application of the Constitution.