



Law Student Professional Development Toolkit

NALP Small/Solo Section and Law Student Professional Development Sections Working Group

The Working Group designed this resource to be a tool in your toolkit as you embark on developing new, or reimagining existing, Professional Development programs for law students at your institution. It is a five-step framework, under the guise of a checklist of things to consider in your planning, implementation, and assessment of your program. It also includes samples of programming and links to additional key resources.

Step One: Audit

- What is your office currently doing?
 - Skill Building
 - Assessment tools
 - Application materials, networking, interviewing
 - Career Exploration
 - Practice areas
 - Types (Bar, JD Preferred, Professional)
 - Sector (Private practice, Government, Public Interest)
 - Competency
 - Professionalism
 - Cultural competency
 - Well-being
 - Ethics
 - Other categories of Professional Development – “preparing to practice”
 - Miscellaneous: managing emails, how to write a client memo
 - Learning employer culture: billable hours, attire, support staff
 - Technology literacy (document management software, naming conventions, social media)
 - Business of the practice of law
 - Financial literacy/managing debt and career planning
- How are these programs delivered?
 - Voluntary programming
 - Mandatory programming
 - Curricular programming
 - Stand-alone course
 - Embedded course
 - Asynchronous recordings

- Check with other units on what they may be doing
 - Skill Building
 - Assessment tools
 - Application materials, networking, interviewing
 - Career Exploration
 - Practice areas
 - Types (Bar, JD Preferred, Professional)
 - Sector (Private practice, Government, Public Interest)
 - Competency
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 - Other Categories of Professional Development – “Preparing to Practice”
 - Miscellaneous: managing emails, how to write a client memo
 - Learning employer culture: billable hours, attire, support staff
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Step Two: Set Goals

- Make them measurable
 - Quantitative
 - Qualitative
- For students
 - Building professional identity
 - Core law student and attorney competencies
 - Identify specific competencies for development
 - Grit, resilience, emotional intelligence
 - Transferable skills
 - Leadership
 - Well-being
 - Ethical practice
 - Leveling the playing field
 - First gen-specific programming
 - DEI programming
 - Inclusion of all student identities
 - Better job planning and career satisfaction

- For schools
 - Reputation (building a positive school identity)
 - Innovation/New programming
 - Decision to adopt existing program or create a unique program for your school
 - Responsive to employers' needs
 - ABA requirements
 - Well-being
 - Inclusion of all staff and faculty identities
 - Staff and faculty job satisfaction
 - Positive relationships with students who grow into alums

Step Three: Get Buy-In

- Administration
 - Professional Identity cannot be a CDO matter only — the entire administration needs to support the idea and any programming for the students to feel it is worthwhile.
 - ABA requirements
 - Partner with relevant offices
 - Find your allies: what other administrators or staff are champions of your office or plan?
 - Admissions: 1L orientation
 - Student and Academic Affairs: upper-level orientations
 - Clinical and experiential learning
 - DEI staff
 - Certificate program
 - Academic Affairs/faculty
- Faculty
 - Find your allies
 - Are there faculty members who already champion the career office and programming? Meet with them. Get their feedback on your plans (or draft plans).
 - Academic courses
 - Partnering with existing relevant academic courses
 - Example: lawyering professors allow time for the career office to give resume and cover letter presentation; environmental law professor hosts speaker from EPA and allows student body to join
 - Create new course or seminar
 - 1L vs. 2L/3L
 - J-term/May term/spring break course
 - Working with faculty to identify competencies relevant to their practice areas
 - Helps point students toward opportunities to develop the competencies
 - Offers opportunities for faculty to remain educated on broad market competencies (example: employer lunches with faculty members as co-hosts)

- Making faculty aware of the career office objectives and programming
 - Allows faculty to inform students about opportunities within career office to develop competencies/participate in career exploration
- Students
 - Branding
 - Frame it from day one as an integral part of their legal education
 - Not just CDO
 - Terminology: etiquette vs. professionalism vs. professional development vs. professional identity
 - Assembling focus groups of upper-level students and recent alums to find out what topics would be relevant
- Step Four: Sort Out Delivery**
 - At what stage do they need to know the information?
 - 1L: job search, interviewing, etiquette
 - 2L/3L: job search refresher, career exploration, managing expectations, job satisfaction considerations
 - Determine the content of the programming
 - Determine who will be providing the programming
 - What are the best ways to get the information across?
 - “Mandatory”
 - Expected, not optional
 - Offer credit
 - Make it part of other required programming (examples: orientation, 1L courses, professional responsibility, clinic)
 - Incentivize
 - Create programming that includes food/drink at interesting locations on or off campus (offer transportation)
 - Offer professionalism certificate program
 - Withhold something (example: not eligible to participate in trip sponsored by career office unless student has done XYZ)
 - Recognition by school: transcript, digital badge
 - Prizes (gift cards, etc.)
 - Schedule programming
 - Execute programming
- Step Five: Assess Goals and Impact (How Did We Do?)**
 - Revisit goals
 - Quantitative: participation numbers, number of programs offered, completion by a specific date, ABA requirement
 - Qualitative: observable changes in students, student feedback expressing personal growth in the target areas, employer feedback
 - Initial assessment/diagnostic vs. assessment upon completion

- Solicit feedback
 - Students
 - Be intentional about how and when you will solicit feedback
 - Schools
 - Check in with administration/faculty to get input on the results
 - Employers
 - Ask what competencies do they want?
 - Do they see the students and graduates from your school holding these competencies?
- Review content and programming
 - Keep what works, modify what doesn't
 - Do you need to rework your goals?
 - Go back to Step One: Audit

Examples of programs:

- [University of St. Thomas School of Law - Holloran Center](#)
- [University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law](#)

Additional Resources:

Neil Hamilton, *Roadmap: The Law Student's Guide to Meaningful Employment* (2018).

Neil Hamilton, *Law Student Professional Development and Formation: Bridging Law School, Student, and Employer Goals* (forthcoming March 2022).

Thiadora Ann Pina, Laura E. Jacobus, and Rupa Bhandari, "Essential Lawyering Skills," a workbook for law students. The workbook is a companion guide to Neil Hamilton's *Roadmap: The Law Student's Guide to Meaningful Employment* (2021).

University of St. Thomas School of Law Holloran Center, [Professional Development Database of program types](#).

NALP, [Report on 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development](#).

AccessLex Institute, [Financial Education resources](#).

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