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Seton Hall Law's weekend program embraces broader perspective on law degree

BY ARTHUR AUGUSTYN

At 44 years old, Todd Kelly had worked as a police officer for 20 years at Elizabeth's police department and his age was catching up to him. He had hoped to be promoted to Lieutenant and focus on administrative office duties, but Kelly suspected that politics and corruption were preventing his promotion more than his performance.

In 2016, Kelly sued his department for wrongfully passing him over for promotion and retaliating against him when he appealed its decision. As he was going over the legal documents, his lawyers made a suggestion.

"They said 'Your career is done, you're not moving up anymore,'" Kelly recalled, and then they told him he was "nuts" if he didn't go to law school.

However, Kelly was working 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., so evening classes were impossible.

Making Law School Flexible for Mid-Career Students

"One word that describes what higher [education] needs to be today is 'nimble,'" said Kathleen Boozang, dean of Seton Hall University's School of Law. "That does not historically describe higher education."

Boozang took over as dean of the law school in 2015 and in only two years she has made substantial changes to the institution's reach and flexibility.

This year, Seton Hall offered for the first time a weekend JD degree program that allows students to attend all-day weekend classes every other week for three years.

For students like Kelly, the weekend program is the only way they can attend law school while juggling work and family responsibilities.

Under Boozang's tenure, admissions have increased 33 percent since 2016. The law school admitted 199 first year students in 2017, up from 152 in 2016, with 47 of those new students joining the weekend program. Tuition is an estimated \$19,500 per semester or \$39,000 per year for part-time

and weekend students. Full-time tuition is \$52,000.

Seton Hall Law was ranked 12th in the nation by American Lawyer magazine for overall employment and 1st by U.S. News & World Report in 2017 for graduates securing judicial clerkships. In 2016, The National Law Journal ranked Seton Hall Law as 15th for graduates in full-time, long-term jobs that require bar passage.

Boozang's mantra for preparing students for the changing legal market is "one student at a time," assuring that all students have access to the school and its facilities, creating opportunities and giving them the tools to adjust to life after graduation.

For a time, evening classes were the ideal solution for mid-career professionals seeking to extend their education, but Boozang says those programs have "withered away."

"I have a full-time job and two kids," said Seton Hall student Guozhou Chen. He works as a patent agent during the day while enrolled in Seton Hall's weekend JD program. "It's very difficult to do things with school after working all day and having a family."

Historically, Seton Hall has had a strong part-time evening division, which is gradually being replaced as each class of evening students graduates. Boozang said the weekend program is "reclaiming [the university]'s roots."

As innovative technologies shake up the business world, the type of education demanded from today's students moves just as rapidly. Some of those shifts include emerging professions that require understanding legal frameworks in addition to other special skills.

"Increasingly we see very important high-level positions in the corporate world that are essentially 'law and' positions," Boozang said.

Technology officers or cybersecurity experts are positions that require a technical understanding of how digital systems work and function, but also a legal understanding of legislation that governs these systems.

Part of Boozang's vision for Se-



Kathleen Boozang, Dean of Seton Hall University School of Law. - AARON HOUSTON

ton Hall Law is to recruit students who majored in computer science, math or artificial intelligence, and are likely to fit into these roles.

"We're seeking to recruit students who are coming [to us] with the 'and' and we will add the 'law,'" Boozang said.

These emerging positions are not the exclusive focus for Seton Hall. Determining what each student is best suited for is a key aspect of Boozang's "one student at a time" mantra.

Full-time and weekend students are assigned a counselor from the law school's career services who will guide them toward career decisions. This hands-on approach is expected of all professors and faculty, including Boozang.

The weekend program is taught by the school's full-time faculty as opposed to adjuncts who would fill in on weekends. The law school's goal is to prepare students for the legal market in place when they graduate and the changes they will encounter in the next 10 to 20 years.

As with most law school graduates, Seton Hall expects students to end up in traditional careers ranging from public defenders to Wall Street lawyers. However, as an increasing number of CEOs and business leaders obtain law degrees, some portion of students may not enter a traditional career in law. Boozang suggested a JD has emerged as a strong alternative to an MBA, teaching similar skills for synthesizing large amounts of in-

formation and acting efficiently in critical situations.

The trend of business leaders pursuing law degrees has affected the program at Seton Hall on a foundational level. Under Boozang, Seton Hall added a financial course to its required curriculum and modified the typical "Research and Writing" introductory course to "Introduction to Lawyering," and broadened its scope. These changes were made as a reaction to the business world's demand that law graduates have a better understanding of raw numbers and possess an expanded set of skills compared to previous generations.

The law school encourages students to consider a variety of potential destinations in which to use their degree, and the students themselves bring diverse perspectives. Students like Chen see the diversity as an added bonus.

"You have wonderful classmates because they're all from different backgrounds and bring tons of knowledge into the class," Chen said, noting that the traditional full-time student skews significantly younger with less life experience.

For Sergeant Kelly, his experience as a plaintiff in a civil case has woven directly into course curriculum.

"It's funny because the stage of the case we're in, protective orders and motions, that's right where we're at in [my] civil procedure class," Kelly said.