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### Making Law School a Place for People Who Know What They Want to Do

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# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## People

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November 24, 2014

## Making Law School a Place for People Who Know What They Want to Do

*Austen L. Parrish became dean of Indiana University's Maurer School of Law in January, at a time when applications to law schools nationwide were falling and jobs were hard to come by. Mr. Parrish, who is 42, describes how he's selling students on law school in this climate. Here is an edited excerpt of his conversation with The Chronicle's Katherine Mangan.*

The number of law-school applications nationally has declined significantly over the last four to five years. We no longer have students coming to law school because they don't know what else to do, and that's a good thing. Some students may also be putting their goals on hold for a while, while they see how the job market plays out.

### THE PROBLEM SOLVER

It's more important now that admissions offices approach recruiting in a relationship-based way. The large, national recruiting fairs and law forums that used to be critical for attracting students when it was hard to get information from schools are no longer that effective. So many schools are putting out so much information today, especially as the number of applications has declined, that it's hard for potential applicants to get past the noise.

At the IU Maurer School of Law, we decided to reach out to engineering schools to funnel students into our intellectual-property-law programs. Engineering students who want to practice patent law are a scarce commodity, and it's one of the few major growth areas in placement. Our [Back Home Again](#) program provides in-state tuition to people who have left the state and lost their residency status. We're also reaching out to high-quality undergraduate institutions like Princeton and Vassar, where

undergraduates are more focused today on job outcomes. Liberal-arts graduates often make good lawyers, and we're joining forces with the best schools to introduce students to the study of law as a viable career-planning option.

We're also reaching out to companies that send employees to get M.B.A.'s to make the point that a joint J.D./M.B.A. program is often a better path toward upper management.

There is no question that, starting in around 2010, the legal market has had major structural changes and as a result, the number of jobs that large law firms are offering has declined. But students are using a J.D. in different ways. For instance, our cybersecurity center has relationships with companies looking for students who might be interested in going into privacy management. Our entrepreneurial law clinic opens students' eyes to how they can use a J.D. degree to create a start-up.

Our approach is to offer scholarships and mentoring. We reject the idea that you can attract students by reducing the sticker price for tuition. Students often view that sticker price as a proxy for quality. We're reaching out to colleges with particularly strong students and saying if you meet certain criteria, you'll get a guaranteed scholarship amounting to 50 percent of annual tuition and access to an alumni mentor.

It sometimes makes sense for law schools to reduce class sizes to maintain quality, but generally they're doing it for ranking purposes, not because it's good for society. I don't believe that law schools should somehow decide what the perfect number of law students is. Why should we deny students the chance to succeed as long as they understand the costs and benefits? Most students are fully aware that earning a J.D. is not a guaranteed ticket to riches and wealth, but it can open the door to a rewarding career if they work hard and hustle.

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