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Students Choosing Traditional Law Practice

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Students choosing traditional law practice

Law students today are not much different from those of the mid-1950s, says Indiana University Bloomington Law School Dean Sheldon Plager.

In the 25 years since the dean was a law student, there have been some fads and some dramatic changes, he said. The fads are gone and today students are concerned with legal careers that offer the best economic opportunities.

While noting the significant increase in University students, one of the most dramatic changes of the period has been the progress of women in law careers, Plager said.

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He explained:

"I was teaching at a school in the '60s where the student body had only three women enrolled out of a total of 600 students. Eight years later a third of the enrollment was women."

Plager said it took a while for some law firms to adjust to the influx of women into law practice, but now they are readily accepted in the profession and in a number of places "they are being eagerly sought." He added that there are still occasional pockets of resistance toward women lawyers.

Concerning fads, Plager noted that there was a time a few years ago when students, swept by a wave of social consciousness, sought careers in environmental law, legal service organizations, and other public interest work.

Today about half of the students go into traditional law practice while the other half go into government law service, clerking for judges, corporate law practice, or teaching, Plager said. He added that students today respond to economic opportunities and peer interests in the business and commercial world.

In the '60s and '70s many students became interested in the "ecology movement" and went into environmental law. Now, Plager said, the environmental field has been left to those who are seriously interested in it and plan to make it their life's work.

Plager pointed out that he was involved in environmental law when it

was known as "water law." Plager, who is a specialist in this field, was at the Washington conference at which this area of study became known as environmental law.

For those students who want the experience, the law school offers pro bono publico (for the public good) programs which include legal service organizations, tax assistance for the elderly, and legal aid for prison inmates—all supervised by faculty.

In response to a comment by Chief Justice Warren Burger about the training and competence of trial lawyers, Plager had this to say:

"You can always improve on what you are doing, and I agree that we need to improve the training and education of those who are going to be trial lawyers. While we must, of course, contin-

ue to put major emphasis on the intellectual content and importance of law as a system and as a social structure, within the limited time we have we should be introducing our students to some of the skills they will need as practicing lawyers."

Despite predictions of a decline in the demand for legal education, Plager said, law school applications were up 10 percent last year and, so far this year, they are running 12 percent higher than last year. He predicts a continuing need for lawyers to provide a wide range of legal services to society in the decade ahead, although he also foresees a period of imbalance between employment opportunities for new lawyers and the numbers of new law graduates.

Baude doubts resolution in sight for school prayer issue

A constitutional amendment that would permit group voluntary prayer in public school classrooms could "catch on like wildfire," says an Indiana University constitutional law expert.

"It's hard for anyone to object to voluntary prayer, especially if it should become an issue in a political campaign," according to Professor Patrick Baude. "On the other hand, there is a feeling among many conservatives that we should not tamper with the Constitution. There are religious groups who are opposed to any government interference in matters of prayer."

Some scholars argue that there are few provisions of the Constitution that are not subject to amendment, Baude pointed out. He added that the amendment process is a long and difficult task. Until this century there was no time limit set on constitutional amendments. Since about 1900, however, Congress has set a time limit, usually seven years, for a constitutional amendment to be ratified by the required 38 states, he said.

The whole issue of prayer in the schools is filled with emotion, but the Constitution itself was born in a very heated and emotional atmosphere, Baude said. There is a fine line between protection of individual religious rights and beliefs and imposing them on others, he explained. Baude doubts there will ever be a definitive resolution of the issue.

Baude does not believe that setting aside a specific time period designated for voluntary prayer would be constitutionally acceptable because this could still have a coercive influence on those who did not choose to pray. However, if a class is given two minutes of free time at the desk without designating how the time should be spent, this might be acceptable, Baude believes.

"It should be remembered," Baude said, "that anyone can pray silently anywhere at any time. It would be clearly unconstitutional, however, for a teacher to say, 'Let's pause for two minutes of silent prayer, or meditation.'"