



Southwestern University Offers the Only Two-Year Accredited Law Degree

[by Anayat Durrani]

Based in Los Angeles, CA, Southwestern University School of Law sets itself apart from other law schools as the only two-year law program offered at an American Bar Association-approved law school.

One of four courses of study leading to a J.D. at Southwestern, SCALE (Southwestern's Conceptual Approach to Legal Education), was created in 1974 by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. During that time, the Fund was the largest federal grant awarded to any law school. The SCALE program combines the study of theory and practice through an intense and structured curriculum that is equivalent to a full three-year program.

SCALE prides itself on its innovative course structure and teaching methods. It provides students with unique learning experiences that offset the theoretical approach of a traditional program with practical hands-on training.

SCALE teaches conceptual learning and simulation training in the classroom to provide students with the skills and experience needed for a real-world law office. The program has smaller class sizes, around 30 students, which provide for greater faculty-student interaction.

Patrick Pyle, assistant dean and general counsel at Southwestern, who is also a graduate of the SCALE program, said the school was "the perfect program for me." He noted that "aside from saving an entire year of class time, it's fast paced, intensive, and contains a strong component of skills work that allows you to 'hit the ground running' upon entering the profession."

Fundamental legal principles and analytic skills are taught to students through an

integrated curriculum that emphasizes hypothetical problems as a teaching method. The first year of the program uses hypothetical problem solving as a tool, teaching substantive concepts of law, and helps students hone their skills in the areas of case analysis, research, writing, and the use of legal principles to resolve disputes.

The first-year curriculum departs from traditional three-year law schools, which offer subjects such as torts and contracts in separate courses. Rather, much of the coursework in the SCALE program is designed to show the interrelationship between concepts and subject matter. The program replicates the daily rigors lawyers face and allows students to train in basic lawyering skills such as oral and written communication, fact gathering, case planning, interviewing, counseling, negotiating, litigation, and the interpersonal matters that come into play in managing a successful law practice. This makes for a much more interactive, hands-on approach to legal education.

The second year of the SCALE program transforms the classroom into a "teaching law office" with the use of simulated client files.

As a functioning law office, students are faced with realistic questions from "clients" whereby students are to respond using appropriate legal documentation, as well as effective oral communication, such as negotiation or trial advocacy. Through this approach, students work individually and in joint projects with emphases on cooperative

learning. The program aims to develop in students stronger skills in advocacy, negotiating, and counseling.

SCALE seeks to educate students as generalists in the law during their first year of the program. During the second year, students can choose a specific area of interest through externship placements, allowing for greater exposure in that area of interest. Students can choose an elective from courses listed in a traditional curriculum such as patent law or family law upon approval from the Dean of Students.

SCALE is an intensive program that absorbs students into the daily demands and realities of practicing law to prepare them for life beyond law school. Externships are scheduled once each year to expose students to a range of working experiences and offer an opportunity for students to become familiar with what it is like to be a practicing attorney. Through the externships, students move from simulation in the classroom to practical learning experience in a law firm, agency, or judicial chambers. During the first year, as part of their externship, students must attend California Supreme Court sessions to hear appellate arguments and are required to prepare draft opinions as if they were justices of the court.

During the second year, students are then given an opportunity for an eight-week externship in a judicial, governmental, public interest agency, or law office setting. The externship is monitored by supervising attorneys who evaluate students' abilities.



Although the course structure and teaching methods differ from other legal education programs, the SCALE curriculum includes all the essential subject matter taught in traditional required courses, including partial coverage of many subjects generally found in elective courses.

Students take numerous and varied writing assignments, which become increasingly sophisticated throughout the entire two-year program. They include research memos, client letters, pleadings, a court opinion, and an appellate brief.

Students are also given the opportunity to participate in co-curricular activities such as Moot Court, *Law Review*, the *Journal of Law and Trade in the Americas*, the Interscholastic Trial Advocacy Program, or interscholastic competitions in client counseling and negotiation.

Classes begin in early July for each of SCALE's two years of the program, and students are in residence for nearly 23 consecutive months. The first year of the program, students attend class an average of 18 hours per week, and during the second year an average of 16 to 18 hours per week.

SCALE draws many second-career students who want to build upon previous education and work experience with law degrees. Only a limited number of juris doctor candidates may enroll, to allow for small class sizes. A typical class size is around 30 to 35 students.

Mr. Pyle noted that "incoming law students often overlook the importance of the human element to their academic success, but because SCALE students stay together as a cohort from start to finish, that continual closeness under the pressures of law school forges friendships that both assist you in school and stay strong long afterward." He added that "I had dinner with one of my SCALE classmates just last night!"