A home away from home

Notre Dame law school’s Chicago program moves into new space on Michigan Avenue

BY JENN BALLARD
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A year ago, students in the University of Notre Dame Law School’s Chicago program didn’t go to a classroom to hear lectures or participate in discussions. They went to office space borrowed from a law firm.

Now, though, “Notre Dame Law in Chicago” — the semester-long program in which students attend classes and an externship including the five this semester we work in a nonprofit agency, office.

The goal of the eight-credit program is to “m ake contact and have a conversation about what people encounter in their offices and how to deal with those things,” Jones said. “We want them to think about what’s going on in the legal market and expose our students to all kinds of practice fields.”

The program is designed for second- and third-year students. Jones aims to have between 10 and 15 enrolled in the spring semester.

Students also take a weekly two-credit reflective course, taught by Jones, who also serves as the program director.

“We want them to think broadly about lawyering and do some reflecting on ethics issues about what people encounter in their offices and how to deal with those things,” Jones said. “We wanted to be able to take advantage of this rich legal market and expose our students to all kinds of practice fields.”

The program’s new space features a conference room and a 40-person classroom with videoconferencing capabilities that also allow Chicago lawyers to teach courses to Chicago and South Bend students simultaneously.

The program also talks about how to relate to clients and reflect on the legal system.

Students also must take additional courses to meet the required 14-credit-hour minimum course load.

When the program started last fall, it borrowed space from Sidley, Austin LLP, then used space at Jenner & Block LLP during the spring semester. And students had to travel to Notre Dame’s South Bend, Ind., campus each week to take additional classes.

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The program also offers a three-credit course on immigration law at Notre Dame’s Chicago classroom.

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This semester, Charles G. Roth, director of litigation at Heartland Alliance’s National Immigrant Justice Center, is teaching a three-credit course on immigration law at Notre Dame’s Chicago classroom.

Roth teaches five Chicago-based students and 17 South Bend students via videoconferencing.

“Chuck is able to have conversations with (South Bend) students through ceiling microphones and speakers,” Jones said. “It’s really an amazing experience. You can really communicate and have a conversation and the students are reporting it is a really high-quality experience for them.”

The course covers the constitutional history of immigration law, visas, deportation and citizenship.

In order to be available for office hours and get face-to-face time with South Bend students, Roth travels to Notre Dame’s campus occasionally and uses the videoconferencing system to connect with the Chicago facility.

“We do all day is immigration and I’m commonly in the federal courts challenging interpretations of immigration laws,” Roth said. “Many of the areas I teach about, I litigate about. It lets me be able to give them some real-life experiences.”

In the future, Jones hopes to have more Chicago adjunct professors for the program. Or, South Bend professors will teach Chicago-based students via videoconferencing.

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The law school program shares second-floor space with other Chicago-based Notre Dame programs, including ones from the business and architecture schools.

The schools’ programs are all part of an initiative to increase Notre Dame’s presence in Chicago, Jones said.

“Notre Dame is a national law school and our alumni are everywhere. Our graduates go all over the country,” Jones said. “But (Chicago) is our No. 1 market in terms of the top place our graduates come to work.”

April Kentala, a third-year student in the program, described her experience working as a law clerk in the Cook County public defender’s office as similar to an apprenticeship.

“We actually get to exercise some of the skills we’ve been trying to learn,” Kentala said. “It also prepares you to practice in the state of Illinois, which is helpful for someone such as myself who wants to practice in Chicago. It’s extremely helpful.”