

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 156, No. 111

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Some schools give quicker path to law degree

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In what appears to be a slowly growing experiment, The John Marshall Law School has entered into an agreement with Lewis University in Romeoville to allow its students to enter John Marshall after three years of college.

This is the fourth college John Marshall has made similar agreements with, and the third one in the last year. The prior agreements were not much publicized.

Students who enter John Marshall after three years from any of those four schools can use credits from their first year of law school to complete requirements for their undergraduate degree.

William B. Powers, associate dean for admissions and student affairs at John Marshall, said the law school does "not have enough experience" yet with students who enter after three years of college to know if the idea will succeed.

"The idea is, especially in this economy, it would be a great advantage to students to be able to get an undergraduate degree and a law degree and spend less time and money," he said.

Students could potentially do college and law school in six years instead of seven and save a year of tuition.

Tuition at Lewis is \$22,990 a year. Room, board, books and other expenses bring the cost of a year at Lewis to \$34,295, according

to CollegeData.com.

Powers said John Marshall entered into similar agreements during the school year that just ended with Lake Forest College and St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Ind.

For "10 or 15 years," John Marshall has had a similar arrangement with Roosevelt University but gets only an "occasional" student that way, Powers said.

Chicago-Kent College of Law in 2004 announced a six-year dual-degree program with the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Regarding the UIC special arrangement, Harold J. Krent, dean of Chicago-Kent, said: "The program is going well. We accept about one or two students a year from the program."

Last September, Chicago-Kent and Loyola University Chicago School of Law announced similar accelerated-degree programs with Lake Forest College to begin in the near future.

The requirements for admission to law school after only three years of college are explained on the web sites of most, but not all, these schools. The standard description says that such accelerated, dual-degree programs are for "a limited number of exceptionally well-qualified students."

Successful applicants typically have an undergraduate, cumulative grade-point average and a score in the Law School Admission Test that are at or above the median of college graduates accepted into

that law school.

In the Lewis program for an accelerated, dual-degree, "students must declare their intent during their first year at Lewis and complete all general education requirements and requirements for their academic major by the end of their third year," said Raymond Kennelly, vice president for enrollment management at Lewis.

"Final decision to admit rests with John Marshall," he said.

Kennelly said Lewis graduates have attended John Marshall in the past and that the law school has "been impressed by their preparation and performance."

Negotiations for the dual-degree program began in early 2010, and it was signed March 31. The agreement was not announced until last week.

"Anything we can do to alleviate the burden of tuition or student loan debt is to our advantage in producing successful and happy alums," Kennelly said.

Regarding the number of lawyers currently unemployed because of the recession, he said, "We certainly will advise students thoroughly of the realities of the profession so that they make an informed decision. Hiring trends in many industries can be cyclical" and law school can be good preparation for a variety of careers.

Powers said he had no estimate of how many students might take advantage of this offer.