

BEYOND Accreditation

Drexel Law School's Next Great Leap

BY DANIEL A. CIRUCCI



Almost three years ago, *The Philadelphia Lawyer* was one of the first publications to detail Drexel University's plans to open a new law school in the Philadelphia area — the first such undertaking in more than a quarter-century. Now that Drexel Law has gained provisional certification from the American Bar Association, we visited the law school to chat with some of the people at the helm of the effort. Here's what we found:

After more than three decades in service to government and academia you might think that Roger J. Dennis would be a bit cynical or even downright jaded when it comes to the task he now faces. But instead, the founding dean of the Drexel University College of Law is positively effusive and irrepressibly optimistic.

"I'm just very excited by the missions of a modern law school," Dennis says as he looks out over Market Street from the new law school's dramatic glass façade.

Dennis, who will mark his first year on the job in May, says he's thrilled that Drexel's Law School has just been granted provisional certification from the American Bar Association, and he looks forward to each new day as the school nears the beginning of its third year of growth.

Accreditation by the American Bar Association is crucial to the success of a law school. It is ABA accreditation that allows the law school's graduates to sit for the

bar examination in all jurisdictions in the United States. The ABA process for obtaining accreditation is a demanding one, and unlike most other academic programs, law schools cannot even apply for their accreditation review until they complete one year of operation.

The ABA review is a multilevel process. It starts with the law school supplying to the ABA a comprehensive set of materials about its university, faculty, students, library, building and curriculum. A team of distinguished judges, practitioners, and academics then visits the school and submits to the ABA a lengthy written report evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the law school. The law school then makes two formal appearances before ABA committees that make the accreditation decision. Normally the whole ABA process takes a complete academic year and it is not unusual for a law school to need a second review by the ABA before it gets its accreditation.

Dennis said Drexel Law was fixated on getting its accreditation at the earliest possible moment so that the school could continue to attract the very best students and faculty. The whole law school community worked on the accreditation process, almost from the moment the school opened its doors. Working with the ABA, the school submitted its materials late in the summer 2007, less than a year from when the school opened.

This enabled the ABA to send its on-site visiting team to Drexel during the first week of October 2007. Because the school was so prepared, the site team was able to submit its report very promptly, which in turn allowed the ABA committees to consider Drexel during January 2008 and February 2008 meetings. The positive decision by the ABA came at the earliest possible moment. Dennis, who has served in many roles in the ABA accreditation process, says, "I am very grateful for the highly professional, quick work by the ABA in their review of us. Our accreditation is the key marker in our effort to become a great law school."

The motto of Drexel University College of Law, *Scientia, Ars, Officium* — Knowledge, Skill, Duty — expresses Drexel's goals for its law student graduates. With its new accreditation status and through its innovative programs, including a 50-hour mandatory pro bono requirement, its unique application of the Drexel co-op to the law school student body, and state-of-the-art resources available at its law library, the law school is not only promoting this motto among its students but is serving as a fine example of it to follow. ■

Daniel A. Cirucci is a public relations consultant and lecturer in corporate communication at Penn State University. He blogs at dancirucci.blogspot.com