

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 161, No. 123

Real-world Chicago-Kent program wins award

BY JACK SILVERSTEIN
Law Bulletin staff writer

IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law launched a “real world” certificate program this spring to give students tangible proof of their practical training.

Now the Illinois State Bar Association is giving the law school tangible proof of the program’s success.

Last week, the ISBA gave IIT Chicago-Kent its inaugural Excellence in Legal Education Award for the school’s Praxis Program, one of 12 awards given at the bar association’s 139th annual meeting in Lake Geneva, Wis.

“We believe that there is an ever-increasing need for students to graduate from law school with more real-world application opportunities to apply the law before they graduate,” said Peter Alexander, the chair of the ISBA’s Legal Education Committee and a law school consultant who served as dean of Southern Illinois University School of Law from 2003 to 2009.

“This was an attempt to recognize those programs that actually do that.”

The Praxis Program — named after the Latin word that distinguishes practice from theory — awards students with a certificate for completing 24 credit hours within 25 experiential courses.

Students must also complete a list of required practice-based experiences such as one live-client clinic or externship; complete three drafts of a self-assessment “scorecard” of skills; create an online portfolio and profile; and complete the course Practice and Professionalism in the third year of law school — the only course

created specifically for the certificate.

“There are a lot of schools doing impressive work, but the Kent nomination pointed out that there is a schoolwide effort ... behind this program,” Alexander said.

Maureen R. Aidasani — who joined the school last July as its director of experiential learning — also complimented the faculty collaboration, specifically citing the work of Dean Harold J. Krent, Assistant Dean for Academic Administration and Student Affairs Stephen D. Sowle and professors Sarah Harding and Katharine K. Baker for their work on the program.

“When I was hired as the director of experiential learning, my job was implementation,” said Aidasani, who was previously in-house counsel at accounting firm Grant Thornton LLP.

“I’m thrilled that we are being recognized for a successful implementation.”

There are currently 27 students working toward the certificate, Aidasani said.

Krent accepted the award on behalf of the school.

“What I’ve heard from law firms as opposed to state or governmental entities is that they expect everybody to be very bright, write well and so forth,” Krent said.

“What sifts out individuals is the graduates who understand the softer skills of how to be successful down the road.”

Krent complimented the program’s ability to prepare students to land a job, “whether it’s the first job or the third job.”

“I can add that we hope that down the line, employers will recognize the Praxis difference and on the margin consider graduates from that program a little more than they otherwise



Maureen R. Aidasani



Harold J. Krent

would have,” he said.

The ISBA created the award this year, e-mailing members in March to request nomination submissions for April. Andrew Sharp was a second-year student working on the certificate when he received the e-mail.

“As soon as I heard about it I thought of the program, and, I thought it would be a shame if we didn’t get it,” said Sharp, who completed his second year last month.

“When I read the description of the award, it just fit Praxis so well.”

Of the four people who nominated the Praxis Program, Sharp was the only student.

“I was delighted to hear that a student felt so positive about his experience and took it upon himself to nominate the program,” Aidasani said.

Also nominating the Praxis Program were alumni Nancy Hablutzel of Hablutzel & Associates, Richard N. Kessler of McDonald, Hopkins LLC and Timothy J. Ritchey of Peck, Ritchey LLC.

The ISBA describes the award as one designed to honor “a law school program that emphasizes real world skill for students.”

Specifically, it recognizes a program, class, clinic or initiative “focused on teaching practical skills.”

IIT Chicago-Kent’s IL Your Way Program was also nominated.

The other nine nominees were:

- The Poverty Law Clinic from DePaul University College of Law
- The Health Justice Project and the Community Law Center Clinic at Loyola University Chicago School of Law
- The Health Advocacy Clinic at Northern Illinois University College of Law
- The workers’ compensation course and the e-discovery course at The John Marshall Law School
- The Community Preservation Clinic, the Federal Civil Rights Clinic and the Intellectual Property Clinic at University of Illinois College of Law

“I applaud the ISBA for thinking it important to create an award recognizing innovation in legal education,” Krent said.

“Certainly many law schools are innovating in tremendous ways. In light of that I am gratified that we were the first winners.”