

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 159, No. 220

## Ahead of the game

Chicago-Kent's '1L Your Way' to offer specialization option, first-of-its-kind clinical rotation course

BY JAMIE LOO

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In an effort to give them an edge when applying for summer jobs and externships, first-year students at IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law next fall will be able to start specializing in a practice area right away.

"In this challenging job market, the earlier a student can specialize, the better off they'll be," Chicago-Kent Dean Harold J. Krent said.

The school's "1L Your Way" program will let students defer a required first-year course to take an upper-level elective such as patent law or business organizations.

The program also includes a new clinical rotation course, touted as the first of its kind in the country, that helps undecided students gain experience in several practice areas.

A decade ago, Krent said, he would have advised students to take their time before deciding on a practice area to focus on. Today's job market, though, tends to reward law school graduates who specialize early, he said, over those who wait too long to make a decision.

Although Krent would prefer not to have students feel pressured into choosing a practice area, he said the law school should create opportunities that guide students along the path to specializing more quickly than in the past.

The new clinical rotation course will allow undecided students to try out three different practice areas over 12 weeks.

Students will be matched with three different faculty practitioners for four weeks at a time, job shadowing and helping with cases such as attending court appearances and writing lease or



Harold J. Krent

settlement agreements.

It's similar to the model used by medical schools.

"In effect, they go on rounds with their clinical professors," Krent said.

The rotation will give students a taste of what it's like to practice in various areas and the skills needed to do it successfully, Krent said.

Students can choose from practice areas including criminal defense, employment discrimination, entrepreneurial law, tax law, immigration law, health and disability law and family law.

The program will help students create a foundation to build on when they seek externships and summer jobs, Krent said, and provide them with a chance to network with others in a specific practice area early in their careers.

"It's a very versatile program

and will help students in a variety of ways," said Heather F. Harper, clinical assistant professor of law in the entrepreneurial law clinic.

Many students come to law school with preconceived notions of what they think they want to do, Harper said, and don't always know the full range of options available to them in the legal profession.

Harper said she regularly has students in her intellectual property and trademark classes who finish the semester saying they had no idea they would be interested in that area of law.

One of the biggest benefits of the clinical rotation is helping students find out what they like and don't like. Harper said some students don't realize a practice area isn't for them until they see it firsthand through an externship.

Students in the program who find a practice area they enjoy can build on that experience by working in the Law Offices of Chicago-Kent later in their academic career.

The rotation will also provide some context for the more substantive law courses first-year law students encounter in future studies, she said, and help them focus their educational interests.

Krent anticipates that about a third of first-year students will enroll in the clinical rotation portion of the "1L Your Way" program.

"I think students will be very interested in this but time will tell," he said.