

# Concentrations: On the Cutting Edge

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The concept of concentrations has received an increasing amount of attention by law schools over the past two decades. Unlike undergraduate majors and minors, which are far more rigid in their requirements of courses for graduation and sweeping in their credit hour allocations, law school concentrations usually are not tied to an award of the J.D. degree. Concentrations were originally developed to showcase full-time faculty specialization and depth in one or two areas within the curriculum, but they are increasingly not limited to such a purpose.

The existence of concentrations organizes the curriculum for students, suggesting areas in which they can take courses that are consistent with career plans; in many ways, the existence of concentrations reduces somewhat the need for individualized faculty advising of students and encourages better elective course selection by students. Concentrations serve the faculty by making obvious the relationship among courses, permitting greater oversight and coordination of existing course content, credit hours, and coverage. At the same time, concentrations encourage better tailoring of the curriculum to fit students' career plans. Concentrations permit more rational, efficient, and transparent long-range curriculum planning and faculty hiring decisions by the faculty and administration, by making obvious those which need to be developed to fit the changing environment of law practice. Concentrations can serve as a boon to student recruiting efforts, by showcasing course offerings and faculty who teach in the upper-level curriculum. Finally, concentrations can be a tool that boosts job placement efforts.



Eleven concentrations were identified and approved during the 2011-12 academic year. In October 2012, the Ad Hoc Curriculum Reform Committee met and reviewed all of the working group reports, together with the registrar and the president of the Student Bar Association. The committee moved adoption of 13 concentrations (we split two of the 11 into two), leading to faculty adoption of all 12 during the 2012-2013 academic year. The process identified the need to build further full-time faculty expertise in certain areas and identified solutions to other potential roadblocks to the plan.

## The 13 concentrations are:

- Business Law
- Civil Litigation
- Criminal Law
- Energy & Environmental Law
- Family Law
- Government & Public Interest Law
- Health Law & Science
- Intellectual Property Law
- International & Comparative Law
- Labor & Employment Law
- Law & Religion
- Real Property Law
- Tax Estate Planning Law

### Common to all concentrations are the following core requirements:

- A “major concentration” requires 14 hours; a “minor concentration” requires 9 hours.
- Each concentration requires preparation of a publishable-quality paper or the equivalent within the field of the concentration, unless a similar written work-product substitute is noted within a concentration description, and the paper must attain a grade of B or better.
- Clinical courses or Trial Advocacy cannot count for more than 3 hours toward any concentration, even if the course is credited for more than 3 hours.
- Courses from overseas programs offered during the summer may count, in total, only for a maximum of 3 credits toward a concentration, regardless of the credit hours otherwise awarded for such courses and programs.
- Independent Research credits may count toward any concentration, as long as the subject and/or paper has been approved by a concentration adviser.
- A student must achieve at least a 3.0 GPA within the courses used to satisfy the concentration; no course may count toward a concentration in which the student’s grade is below a C.
- There is no bar to a student fulfilling more than one concentration; however, a concentration course may be used to satisfy only one concentration.
- Each concentration has one or two members of the permanent full-time faculty appointed to serve as faculty advisers; such appointments are made at the discretion of the dean, for a term of two to four years in order to ensure continuity and consistency.
- Changes to a concentration, such as addition of courses, may be proposed by any member of the faculty, but those proposals must be reviewed and approved by the Curriculum Committee prior to review and possible approval by the full faculty. 🗳️

## The Value of Core Competencies

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Duquesne University School of Law’s class of 2013 is getting a head start on studying for this July’s bar examination due to the Law School’s newest bar preparation program, Core Competencies for Legal Practice. Core Competencies is a newly implemented four-credit, two-semester course offered in the final academic year to both day and evening students. Taught by Richard Gaffney, the course is designed to provide students with training in the type of legal reasoning required to succeed on the bar examination and as newly admitted attorneys in practice.

The course reinforces and builds upon the fundamental concepts learned in the first two years of law school by providing a review of the key legal concepts that students will encounter on the bar examination and in practice. The course covers core competencies in the subject areas of contracts, torts, property law, evidence, constitutional law, criminal law and criminal procedure. Lecture topics include substantive law, professional responsibility (character and fitness issues) and multiple choice test-taking skills. Students also learn how to respond to performance test questions that are a critical component of modern bar examinations. Unlike most courses, Core Competencies “flips” the classroom, posting the substantive lectures and “black letter law” online and using classroom time



for application of legal principles to new cases and fact patterns. Gaffney deconstructs and reverse-engineers multiple choice and essay-type bar examination questions, while students hone their analytical skills by repeatedly applying the law to new fact scenarios, which appear in multiple choice and essay forms.

Student feedback about the course has been overwhelmingly positive; 163 senior students enrolled in the course this year. Third-year student Pernille Frankmar describes the course as “a great initiative to keep up the hard work in the last year of law school. It eases us into the bar exam and helps us see how much work is required for the exam, while lowering our stress level because we are so familiar with the core concepts.”

Other students agree, as the feedback below suggests:

“This class is invaluable. The amount of material is daunting, but the way the course is broken down, it provides me with a feeling that I can actually learn it all. The most valuable aspect of this class is that I am studying for the bar exam now rather than just beginning in the spring.”