

# VERMONT LAW SCHOOL

## **Positioning and Messaging 2009-2010**

Vermont Law School will demonstrate, through concrete evidence, its commitment to advancing legal efforts that serve the public interest, promote social justice, and protect the natural world. Primary messaging will promote awareness of factors that are influential in prospective students' decisions:

- The ways in which a VLS education provides students options and leads them to opportunities—during school and especially upon graduation
- Where VLS graduates get jobs
- The quality, accomplishments, and impact of VLS faculty
- The variety of program offerings at VLS, including international, environmental, experiential, and clinical
- The contributions students make while at VLS through clinics and collaborations with professors on real cases
- The diversity of the VLS community
- The emphasis on professional ethics in legal practice

### **Communications Guidelines**

- The school's communications will be designed to educate and inform—and subtly persuade—readers and audiences
- Credible, informational evidence combined with community members' images and voices will be the conceptual basis of all recruitment communications
- The communications office will coordinate with other offices on campus to gather current institutional evidence on a consistent and ongoing basis. Evidence may include but will not be limited to:

- Community member insights on current legal issues and approaches
  - Recurring and special events that draw legal experts and scholars to campus
  - Innovations to the VLS curriculum
  - Interesting and successful student-faculty collaborations
  - Individual faculty, student, alumni accomplishments and awards
  - Recent bar passage, internship, and job placement statistics and details
- Even when using community member quotes, messaging will avoid overly personal and declarative language in favor of more authoritative and informational language

## **Institutional Positioning Platform**

Vermont Law School was founded on the belief that the legal scholarship it fosters and the education it provides should help serve the common good and protect the natural world. The school is a community that frankly and proudly advocates—for the causes its members believe in passionately, for rigorous and practical legal education, and for its students and graduates in their development and careers. The school’s legal scholars, practicing professionals, and administrators guide and prepare students to use legal skills to effect change in the public interest, public policy, and social justice through work with nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, and private firms.

As a leader in environmental law, VLS is active in redefining what that field encompasses to include a broadening array of social justice, energy policy, wildlife, land use, sustainability, and climate crisis issues. The school continues to offer strong programs in international law and dispute resolution and dual JD/master’s degree programs in business administration, environmental management, environmental policy, philosophy, and other evolving fields.

Vermont Law School serves as a resource for a diverse community of students, faculty, legal professionals, educational institutions, advocacy organizations, domestic and international governments, and many others with a shared commitment to aggressively pursue substantial and positive change in their communities and countries. The experience that VLS provides prepares graduates to engage with the critical issues of their time.

### **Characteristics of VLS and keywords**

- Advocacy, public interest, environmental protection, social justice, ethics
- Interdisciplinary and generalist training, focus on problem solving
- Practical training, experiential learning, real-world impact

- Nimble, flexible, and independent
- Future-oriented, entrepreneurial, cutting edge
- Focus on relationship building, collaboration, team learning
- An institution shaped by participation and by tradition

## **Institutional Talking Points**

The information laid out below is intended to guide members of the Vermont Law School community in effectively and succinctly communicating the school's credible and compelling strengths. All external messaging and talking points should align with the guidelines and themes contained in the VLS institutional positioning concept. Please note that while many of the points below may be used verbatim, they are intended to provide an outline for the type of current information that should be conveyed about VLS to various audiences.

### **General characteristics**

- Our approach to legal education combines a traditional, core curriculum with practical, interdisciplinary training that anticipates and directly addresses the changing needs of the legal profession and the issues lawyers will engage. For example (speakers can pick 2-3):
  - To be effective advocates for clients, lawyers must first know the law, be able to structure an argument, and be aware of core ethical principles
  - To promote social reform, lawyers must fully understand the applications of law to community issues
  - To affect environmental problems, lawyers must become conversant with environmental science and policy
  - To resolve disputes outside of courts, lawyers must learn to negotiate effectively, read social and cultural cues, develop empathy, and explore creative problem solving
  - To teach and research in the law, lawyers must study legal precedents and jurisprudence
  - To work in the business world, lawyers must be comfortable with the principles of management, economics, and social psychology
  - To work in international law, lawyers must understand interrelated issues such as energy policy, climate change, international law, and human rights law
- As legal scholars and experienced practitioners, VLS faculty have the knowledge and flexibility to design academic and experiential courses that help students develop the skills needed to step directly into legal practice after graduating.

- VLS consistently ranks among the top schools in environmental law programs and serves as an international resource on environmental law, regulation, and policy. For example:
  - Through the U.S.-China Partnership for Environmental Law, VLS is helping to train Chinese leaders on environmental law with an emphasis on energy law.
  - In cooperation with the U.S. State Department, VLS helped launch the first Russian law clinic at Petrozavodsk State University in Karelia.
- VLS demonstrates its institutional values in myriad ways, including campus investments resulting in a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver Certification for campus facilities, historical preservation efforts, and a food service that emphasizes serving locally produced products.

### **Opportunities and options for VLS students**

- Many VLS students take advantage of VLS clinics and experiential programs that provide hands-on training and involve students in real cases and legal issues as students. These programs include (speakers can pick several):
  - Semester in Practice program matches self-directed students with mentors who are legal professionals in a range of fields for independent, external projects.
  - South Royalton Legal Clinic serves low-income residents in the area who need assistance with issues involving family law, housing, welfare and unemployment, health care, immigration, Social Security, children's rights, consumer protection, bankruptcy, contracts, wills, and civil rights. Guided by experienced attorneys, students represent clients in state court, federal court, and administrative hearings.
  - Environmental and Natural Resource Law Clinic, where qualified students work alongside legal experts to advance environmental protection goals while developing their research, advocacy, and litigation skills.
  - Institute for Energy and the Environment serves as a resource on energy law and policy and a center for graduate research on energy issues. Three of eight interns at FERC last summer were from Vermont Law School.
  - Land Use Clinic gives students the opportunity to help develop training materials for local officials, draft land use legislation, and work on conservation easements as they apply their knowledge of law and policy for the benefit of the land use community and the public..
  - Legislative clinic, which takes advantage of VLS's proximity to the state capital through internships with the Vermont General Assembly.
  - Judicial externships offer structured programs in which students gain both academic background on judicial issues and hands-on experience working in judges' chambers.

- JD, MELP, and LLM internships in which students gain real world experience in general and environmental law and policy in a wide variety of settings both locally and worldwide.
  - General Practice Program, which simulates a professional law firm with professors as partners overseeing student associates who are expected to perform a range of legal activities and handle client cases. The GPP received the 2007 E. Smythe Gambrell Professionalism Award from the American Bar Association.
  - *Vermont Law Review*, a legal journal managed and edited by students.
  - *Vermont Journal of Environmental Law*, an online and print environmental journal managed and edited by students.
- The school's size and emphasis on collaboration fosters an environment where students are valued for the contributions they make to and the changes they initiate within the VLS community. Whether through independent collaborations with faculty or through the Student Bar Association, students help shape academic and co-curricular course work and campus policies.

#### **Job placements for students and graduates**

- VLS alumni are successfully working at the intersection of law and politics, science, economics, and ethics. Their knowledge, leadership skills, and experience allow them to serve in positions of responsibility and influence throughout the US and in countries around the world.
- A sampling of professional placements for the class of 2009:
  - Judicial clerkships include the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, a U.S. Magistrate Judge in New Jersey, and in the following state and district courts: Alaska, Colorado, DC, Massachusetts, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Vermont, the Virgin Islands, and Virginia.
  - National firm placements range from Bernstein Shur in Portland, Maine, to Beveridge & Diamond in Washington, DC, to Weil Gotshal & Manges in New York, to Sher & Leff in San Francisco.
  - Public sector, public service, and public interest jobs with organizations such as the American Council on Renewable Energy, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Association of State Flood Plain Managers
- Some statistics on the class of 2008:
  - Over 47 percent accepted positions with public-interest groups, nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, or in judicial clerkships.
  - Within nine months of leaving VLS, 95 percent were employed in the U.S. and abroad.
  - Over 85 percent passed at least one state bar exam.

- Fellowships include:
  - Presidential Management Fellowship
  - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of General Counsel Honors Attorney Fellowship
  - Environmental Law Institute Fellows
  - Environmental Law Center International LLM Fellowship
  - Institute for Energy and the Environment Global Energy LLM Fellowship
  - Land Use Institute LLM Fellowship
  
- VLS graduates started work for many public-interest and nonprofit organizations in the past year, including:
  - Sierra Club
  - Vermont Public Interest Research Group
  - The Chattahoochee Valley Land Trust
  - Legal services organizations in Georgia and Maryland
  - Public defender offices in Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, and Washington
  
- VLS graduates have careers and leadership positions in international organizations such as:
  - The World Bank
  - Human Rights First
  - United Nations Development Program
  - Baker MacKenzie
  - Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer
  - Earthjustice
  - The Grameen Foundation
  - The Center for International Environmental Law
  - The United Nations Environment Programme
  
- Use narratives of recent alumni as career examples; some possibilities:
  - Elizabeth MacDonough JD'98 – Senior Assistant Parliamentarian for the U.S. Senate
  - Kishan Khoday JD'00 – Assistant Country Director, UN Development Program in China
  - Meredith Hatfield, MSEL'96, JD'99, State of New Hampshire consumer Advocate, leading the NH fight v. Fairpoint
  
- Use narratives of more established alumni for networking examples; some possibilities:
  - Glenn Berger JD'78, Partner, Energy and Infrastructure Projects, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom
  - Colleen Connor JD'85, Manager and Counsel, General Electric

- Charles Di Leva JD'78, Chief Counsel, Environmental and International Law Unit of the World Bank

### **Quality, accomplishments, and impact of faculty**

- VLS faculty are regularly sought out as legal experts by national and international law firms, educational institutions, government agencies, and advocacy organizations seeking consultation or research on specific legal concerns. For example,
  - Oliver Goodenough's work with the Law & Neuroscience Project involves creating opportunities for judges and legal experts from around the country to partner with leading neuroscientists to examine how neuroscience can shed light on problems of law and justice. He also works to educate media and academic leaders about the intersection of neuroscience and the law.
  - Cheryl Hanna is a regular legal commentator on Vermont Public Radio on issues dealing with constitutional law, criminal law, women and the law, and the US Supreme Court.
- Recent faculty awards include:
  - The National Wildlife Federation's National Conservation Achievement Award given to Pat Parenteau for his research and advocacy work on coal powered power plants.
  - The National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners' Energy Resources 2008 Kilmarx Award to Michael Dworkin for outstanding contributions to good government, clean energy, and the environment.
  - Professors Tracy Bach and Jason Czarnecki were awarded Fulbright Scholarships in 2009 to conduct research in Senegal and China, respectively.

### **Program offerings**

- In addition to the general JD program, VLS offers a unique one-year master's degree in Environmental Law and Policy and LLM degrees in Environmental Law and American Legal Studies, as well as certificate programs in Energy and the Environment, General Practice Program, and International and Comparative Law.
- VLS offers dual JD/master's degree programs in business administration, environmental management, environmental policy, philosophy, and other fields through partnerships with Yale, Dartmouth, Northeastern, Cambridge, Cergy-Pontoise, Seville, Thunderbird, and the University of Vermont.
  - VLS has semester exchange programs with five U.S. law schools as well as McGill, Trento, and Cergy-Pontoise.

- VLS offers the largest number and widest variety of environmental law courses in the country, taught by some of the top scholars in the field. The environmental law program was ranked #1 by *U.S. News & World Report* in 2009, for the 12<sup>th</sup> time since the magazine began this ranking.
- Every summer, VLS attracts legal, energy, industry, and environmental experts who teach courses and lead seminars on a range of pressing topics during summer programs. Lecturers and topics addressed during summer 2009 included:
  - Peter Bradford, former member of the US Nuclear Regulatory commission, speaking on the potential for new nuclear plants to combat climate change.
  - Randy Lee Loftis of *The Dallas Morning News* speaking on the impact of newspaper cutbacks on the media function as environmental watchdog.
  - Oscar Avalle, Deputy Special Representative of the World Bank to the United Nations, teaching a course that explores the intersection of energy and development, especially considering the implications of climate change.
- VLS's Career Services Office helps students chart paths that lead them to the jobs they want and counsels them on loan repayment strategies, including the new federal income-based loan repayment program and loan forgiveness program for those choosing public-interest jobs.
- VLS offers a Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) that helps JD graduates committed to pursuing careers in public-interest law.

### **Contributions and impacts students are having**

- In the summer of 2009, three of the eight law student interns chosen to work at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission came from Vermont Law School.
- In 2008, the students in Professor Hanna's Women and the Law course were examining the legal issues associated with a domestic violence and decided to get involved. Under Prof. Hanna's guidance, students wrote and filed an amicus brief with the US Supreme Court on the impact the case would have on victims of domestic and sexual violence. In January 2009, the Supreme Court heard the case, received the amicus brief, and adopted the position laid out in it. The position was eventually written by Justice Ginsberg.
- In 2008, VLS student Sally Adams received 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the American Bar Association Family Law essay competition. Her essay appeared in the Family Law Quarterly.
- Student researchers involved with the Institute for Energy and the Environment have developed an educational website, [agenergysolutions.org](http://agenergysolutions.org) and a guide that outlines how independent farmers can incorporate energy efficient technology into their farming

practices and how to use energy efficiency, biomass and renewable energy to decrease farm energy costs. This allows farmers to act as stewards of the land by showing them the resources currently available to help improve the environment while simultaneously improving their bottom line.

### **Diversity of the community**

- VLS students come from all 50 states Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and other countries including Guam, Brazil, Canada, Italy, Japan, Russia, and Spain.
- VLS students come from undergraduate institutions that range across the geographic spectrum of the country and in size and type from Yale to the University of Colorado to Western Washington University.
- While some students come to VLS soon after graduating from college, others have spent years in a wide variety of professions including engineering, teaching, lobbying, corporate management, nonprofit programming, and many others.
- Men and women are equally represented in both the student and faculty populations.
- Student organizations include:
  - The Alliance – a coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and straight members of the law school community striving to achieve equality before the law
  - Environmental Law Society
  - The Federalist Society
  - Native American Law Society
  - Phi Alpha Delta – the largest service-oriented, co-ed, professional law fraternity in the U.S.
  - Sports and Entertainment Law Society
  - Vermont Legal Research Group
- VLS has chosen not to allow military recruiters on campus in response to the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, and as a result has forfeited a number of significant opportunities for federal grants: “Every once in a while an issue comes to a community and, despite a cost, it comes to the conclusion that it has to stand up for its principles. It has to do with speaking truth to power, and it’s one of those roles that those of us lucky enough to be trained as lawyers hopefully take from time to time.” —Jeff Shields
- For more than five years, VLS has been awarded the Council on Legal Education Opportunity Diversity Award; the ABA recognized VLS as one of nine law schools that are

Educational Partners in Diversity; and the Society of American Law Teachers cited VLS for commitment to the principles of nondiscrimination and equality.