In times of dramatic change, those with vision step forward to shape the path of transformation, to seize new opportunities, and to lead.
Legal education in the United States finds itself in the midst of a perfect storm. Against the backdrop of national economic stagnation, law schools have seen declines in applications, negative coverage in the media, and diminishing career prospects for graduates. When this storm passes, legal education will be forever changed, and at Villanova, we are determined that we will be well positioned.

We are taking charge of our future and seizing opportunities to better prepare our students for this new world. We are moving forward with a series of initiatives that will make Villanova Law School a stronger and evermore prestigious institution. By implementing this Strategic Plan, we will:

- provide cutting-edge legal education for our students to both broaden and deepen their understanding of the law and its global reach;
- prepare our graduates to compete for a wider array of professional opportunities;
- ensure that our faculty’s scholarship is highlighted and made accessible to our students and the wider scholarly community; and
- create a distinctive curriculum with innovative co-curricular programming, which will set us apart in a highly competitive market.

We are also committed to a strong stand on affordability. We will guarantee the members of each new class that the tuition rate they pay upon entering will apply over their three years here. In addition, we will strive to increase our investment in scholarships and student support at a faster rate than any future tuition increases.

The strength of this Strategic Plan is that it reflects the vision and effort of many dedicated people who have approached the task with openness to new possibilities. Much work lies ahead, but we approach this work eagerly, confident that our efforts will yield great results for Villanova Law School.

At Villanova Law School, we are stepping forward.

John Y. Gotanda, JD
Dean and Professor of Law
Imperative I: Strengthening Our Curriculum

We will redesign the academic experience to align the knowledge, skills, and values we teach with the demands of professional practice.

For too long, changes in the legal industry have outpaced innovation in legal education.

We teach the core skills of legal analysis very well, but today our students need more. Employers expect our graduates to arrive on the job practice ready. Lawyers find themselves working not as independent specialists, but as members of multidisciplinary business teams—a reality that calls for new forms of training. Meanwhile, the vital importance of excellence in writing demands that we provide intensive instruction.

Building on the work of legal educators nationwide and on feedback from our alumni and employers, we have identified a set of critical competencies. These are the skills our graduates need to thrive, not only on their first day on the job, but over the course of their careers.

These competencies range from intellectual abilities to organizational talents, to strengths of character. They include diligence, adaptability, practical judgment, and strategic planning. In addition, legal practice now requires a basic level of business literacy we must address.

We are now working to reform our curriculum to encompass each key competency we seek to develop. The result will be a deeper and broader student experience—a richer intellectual exploration and more powerful professional preparation.

Initiatives
• Develop new learning opportunities to fill gaps where key competencies are not addressed, including modules on finance, accounting, project management, entrepreneurship, and the business of law.
• Transform the second and third years from an eclectic assembly of courses to a clear, coherent progression and incorporate greater use of simulations, group work, and projects beyond the classroom.
• Extend the emphasis on legal writing beyond the first year with six full semesters of writing instruction.

“We are moving forward with a clear guiding aim: Intensifying writing instruction, expanding clinics and externships, and building a basic business understanding into every student’s experience—these changes will help make our graduates better prepared than ever before.”

Richard Booth
Martin G. McGuinn Chair in Business Law
Professor of Law
The chance to gain experience in real practice settings stands out as a highlight of a Villanova Law School education. Students complete externships. They work in our internationally recognized clinics. They dedicate themselves to community service through award-winning programs such as Lawyering Together, partnering with area attorneys on pro bono projects.

Through this Strategic Plan, we will increase the range of these opportunities and the depth of experience they offer. Most important, we will make them a part of every Villanova student’s legal education. In doing so, we will take a strength that has always defined our school and turn it into an advantage that will distinguish us.

Experiential learning offers rich rewards. It connects legal theory with real-world practice and supports our work in student formation—helping future lawyers find a place in the law where they can each thrive. It also provides our students with professional contacts and solid experience for their résumés.

In addition, learning through experience is the only way to build some of the competencies essential for our graduates. From professional judgment to an understanding of what it means to stand behind one’s legal work—these are qualities teachable only in the context of real practice settings.

**Imperative II: Moving to a New Level in Experiential Learning**

We will enrich and expand opportunities to learn through clinics, externships, and service.

**Initiatives**
- Make an intensive practice experience a part of every student’s education.
- Expand the time students work at an externship, allowing them to take on more significant responsibilities.
- Add placements beyond the region, including international positions, as well as options in for-profit settings to complement those in non-profits and in government so that students can gain practical experience in a wider array of legal settings.
- Add new cutting-edge clinical courses, such as the pilot health law clinic.

We are moving beyond traditional externships to full-time immersions in legal practice.
Villanova Law School’s Augustinian Catholic identity is at the heart of this community and all our work. This starts with our conception of the law itself—the understanding that legal practice is not simply about the manipulation of rules; it is fundamentally a humanistic endeavor.

As educators, we embrace our responsibility not merely to confer legal competency, but to guide the students in our care, promoting their holistic development. We celebrate service, and, through our clinics, address challenges related to the ideals of social justice. We have always defined ourselves as a community of inclusion—welcoming students of all backgrounds.

Many dimensions of this strategic plan interrelate, and all connect back to ideals rooted in our Augustinian Catholic tradition—from the decision to expand service opportunities and to focus more intensively on student formation, to the proposal that we adopt more holistic admissions criteria.

As we look to the future, we are committed to building upon the strengths that set this community apart. This means finding the best ways to reflect our Augustinian Catholic identity in our work, affirming the mutual respect and concern that guide our interactions, and increasing the diversity of our intellectual community, ensuring that all people feel a true sense of belonging here.

Imperative III: Strengthening Our Community and Our Commitment to Mission

As we pursue our ambitions for the future, we will continue to align our progress with the ideals on which our school was founded.

Initiatives

• Add elective courses that examine the law from the perspective of Villanova’s Augustinian Catholic mission.
• Explore creation of a Center on Law and Religion and a clinic focusing on adoption.
• Foster an appreciation and understanding of our Augustinian Catholic identity among faculty, staff, and students.
• Strengthen feeder school relationships that will bring us more diverse students and intensify international recruitment.

“We have such strengths to build on, from an outstanding faculty, to a fabulous building, to the special perspective of being part of an Augustinian university. For me, this all points to our taking a unique place among American law schools—a place of leadership.”

Paul A. Tufano ’86
Executive Vice President and General Counsel, Independent Blue Cross
University Trustee and Member of the VLS Board of Consultants
For decades, Villanova Law School has made its reputation as a source of leaders in and beyond the legal profession. From managing partners of firms across our city and region to bar association presidents, a United States senator, state and federal judges, and a Pennsylvania governor, our alumni have made their mark.

Credit for this success can be traced back to the Law School’s founding dean and his colleagues, who actively sought out leadership potential. They recruited not only valedictorians and Phi Beta Kappas, but also team captains, class presidents, and returning veterans. As we think about the alumni we want to send before the bar in the decades to come, we seek a return to this earlier admissions philosophy.

We move in this direction because we know that LSAT scores and undergraduate GPAs are not wholly predictive of achievement in professional careers. Meanwhile, factors such as prior work experience, military service, and years out of college all correlate positively with bar pass rates and successful employment outcomes. These factors deserve—and will receive—greater attention.

**Imperative IV: Enrolling Future Leaders**

We will challenge the dominant measures of the law school applicant, turning to more powerful predictors of those who will truly excel.

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**Initiatives**

- Improve the assessment of non-cognitive factors in the application process and weigh leadership potential, business experience, cultural competence, and public service.
- Shape evidence-based recruitment policies, which look at the qualities of applicants who go on to perform well at Villanova, pass the bar at high rates, and achieve long-term success.
Imperative V: Opening Pathways into the Law School and the Law

We will think creatively about the ways we admit students, building new pipelines and removing old obstacles.

The world in which our graduates now make their way is radically different from just a few short years ago. Competition for traditional positions is fierce, and newly minted JDs face pressure to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Nationally, law school applications are trending downward—a reaction to the job market.

It is time to think pragmatically about new ways of reaching out to students and new ways of preparing them for what comes after law school.

We see a number of promising directions for innovation:

• Develop joint admissions agreements and other special options to attract students we might otherwise not reach. These would include accelerated 3/3 bachelor’s/JD programs with select undergraduate partner schools.

• Create programs to help our students specialize more extensively, moving to the top in a competitive job market. These would include joint degree offerings like those already in place, plus more flexible certificate programs in such areas as Environmental Law and Health Law.

Changing times call for changing tactics, and we are ready to respond.

Initiatives
• Hold the line on tuition—guarantee each new class that the rate they pay upon entering will apply over their three full years while enrolled.
• Explore innovations ranging from early action and early decision programs, to selective use of fee waivers and joint programs.
• Market the Law School more actively and skillfully—from consistent brand messaging to effective outreach through a range of printed and digital communications.

“This plan grows out of the historic strengths of the institution. It draws on the forward thinking ideas of very capable leaders. And it’s informed by the real-life experience of people in practice.”

Diane E. Ambler '78
Partner, K&L Gates
Member of the VLS Board of Consultants
The members of the Law School’s faculty bring considerable talent and experience to this Strategic Plan. Still, the initiatives envisioned present novel challenges. Faculty will be called on to incorporate new lawyering skills into existing courses, to design new non-traditional courses, and to take on greater responsibilities in the professional formation of our students.

As we move forward with this plan, therefore, we will need to support our faculty effectively. We will develop workshops on innovative teaching methods. We will offer grants for creating new teaching materials. And we will reward successful efforts to develop new pedagogical skills needed to teach the broad range of competencies our curriculum will call for.

At Villanova Law School, we will continue to teach fundamental legal concepts, and we will continue to prepare our students to think and express themselves like lawyers. Meanwhile, we will enlarge the range of knowledge, values, and skills students acquire.

To do this, we will recruit and retain inventive teacher-scholars, support our current faculty in their growth, and sustain an intellectual environment where a strong core program and curricular innovations can thrive together.

**Imperative VI: Supporting Faculty Innovations**

We will build on faculty strengths in teaching and research, to promote a dynamic intellectual environment and nurture innovation.

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**Initiatives**

- Enhance efforts to recruit, retain, and support the best teacher-scholars.
- Work to increase faculty diversity, provide additional endowed chairs, and recognize a broader range of achievements.
- Provide support for developing innovative teaching modes and learning experiences.
- Capitalize on our new building’s robust technology infrastructure, including developing faculty skills for conducting online distance education programs.

We are moving beyond the traditional model of a law professor to build a faculty at the leading edge of legal teaching.
The process of student formation has always been part of a legal education at Villanova. We have never simply taught a body of knowledge, but sought to nurture our students in their holistic development, a goal at the heart of Augustinian Catholic education.

As we move forward with this Strategic Plan, we will approach student formation more thoroughly and intentionally than ever before—putting programs in place to ensure that each student is well supported in a process of growth and self-discovery.

Our aims in student formation are integrally connected to the other pillars of the Strategic Plan: the shift to a competency-based curriculum, expansion in experiential learning, and new opportunities for students to customize their educations and earn specialized credentials.

As we envision the sequence of courses spanning a student’s full JD experience, our goal is to shape a clear progression from first year to graduation. We want all students to have the chance to define a set of goals reflecting their individual strengths and then to plan a program of study that will uniquely advance these goals.

Imperative VII: Focusing on Student Formation

We will help our students find their places in the legal profession and prepare for lives of fulfillment.

The nature of assessment in our classes, moving away from a single end-of-term exam to periodic evaluation and feedback.

• Make faculty-student retreats a regular part of our calendar, providing a chance for reflection, discussion, and vocational discernment.

• Augment our advising program, providing students with both a faculty advisor and an advisor drawn from the ranks of the active bar.

• Expand Career Strategy programming.

“We are taking bold steps forward and at every stage our path is inspired by our Catholic and Augustinian roots. We want to prepare lawyers who will adapt and thrive and who will find a vocation in the law and pursue work of real value.”

Michelle Madden Dempsey
Professor of Law