

Access to Justice Commission Standing Committee on Law School Partnerships
Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2014
3:00 p.m. Call-In Meeting

In Attendance: Jamie Iguchi, Angie Wagenhals, Patty Fain, Hillary Wandler, Stephan Kolis, Randy Snyder, Judge Krueger, Judge Fagg, Erin Farris, and Kate Kuykendall.

Call to order: 3:03 p.m.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

Jamie summarized the question format suggested by Jessica Walker Keleher, and opened the floor for discussion.

Hillary noted that some students will not know what a “legal residence” or “incubator” program means. There’s a bit of a description after that that could be added; we could include information about how it’s like a mentorship program. Students may not know what we’re talking about enough to weigh in. The second part of the question elicits feedback that would be great if students can respond, but if students don’t really know what the question means then the answers we get to the second part could be all over the map and totally unhelpful.

Patty echoed Hillary’s comments. There’s a wide variety of programs out there. Even if someone thinks they know, residency programs look different from incubator programs. Without some explanation or a menu of things that would be important, it may not be effective. It needs to be expanded to be more explanatory. We’re also talking about students who have not yet been in practice, and about post-graduates that may know what they’re missing. They can help identify what can be offered, that isn’t typically offered in law school that might help people hang their shingle. Mentoring and business model skills are important. Think about the questionnaire in terms of students AND new lawyers that recently graduated, and know what skills they could have benefitted from gaining.

Stephan shared the concerns mentioned by Hillary and Patty, noting that he is familiar with the field but isn’t aware of what a program like this would look like. He emphasized that he doesn’t feel students will be aware of it either, and suggested educating the survey sample before taking the survey. He added that the open-ended nature of the second question may turn people off; free-form answers aren’t appealing to busy students. He did agree that it’s important to avoid shaping responses too much by asking the wrong questions.

Jamie agreed that we should move away from expecting respondents to have to come up with free-form answers on the spot. Maybe we can try to move away from leaving it open-ended, and risking not getting any feedback at all.

Judge Krueger said he likes the concept, but asked who the overall umbrella for a program like this would be and where funding might come from.

Jamie replied that at this stage, the committee is working to put together a model or report of what a program that fits Montana’s needs would look like. If there’s a decision to act down the road, the groundwork will already have been done. Determining what fits Montana is worthwhile.

Judge Krueger agreed that this is a useful approach.

Jamie emphasized that the funding question is important. Incubators are funded in a wide variety of ways, from being completely unfunded to being fully funded and many combinations in between. Funding at the end will be part of the concept the committee develops, and will need to be addressed in the model.

Patty said that because of the broad spectrum of what we're discussing, there are resources we could tap into now. With all the work we're doing, it's of value to develop resources. In the end, if we're putting in all this effort, there are parts that we can benefit from even if there's no funding. The grandfather of incubators (_____) is willing to help. There's the ABA job corps as well that will be happy to act as a resource. We need to ask the questions of the students and faculty, but we need to bring in input from the experts in the field as well. They can help identify who we should bring to the table.

Jamie agreed that the funding element should definitely not be considered last. The committee needs to consider whether we want to map our funding options onto the student needs, or do we map the students' needs on to the funding options.

Jamie turned back to what we want this survey to look like. We've had a comment suggesting we provide information to students about what they're talking about, and a comment suggesting that we might not want to leave it open-ended. Are there other comments?

Patty asked how the survey will be administered?

Hillary said that the law school has a SurveyMonkey account.

Patty noted that this means logic skipping is an available option. We can have follow-up questions that are responsive to answers.

The Committee discussed how logic skipping might work.

Angie asked whether there will be an explanation included with the questions, noting that we won't likely get much feedback if we confuse people with the first question.

Jamie suggested that a small group work on drafting some explanatory language after the call. Ideally, we'll describe incubators at the most general level without being too wordy. Specific terms like legal residency or incubator should not be in the question.

Jamie asked the law school representatives to get in touch with Jeff Wilson and come up with the actual questions, in line with what we talked about today, instead of having everyone try to come together and send a draft back and forth. The committee agreed.

Patty mentioned that the state bar has presentations, and that there are other opportunities to explain what we're talking about more thoroughly to get students thinking about it before administering the survey. That might be a good way to get some more insight and digest their perspective, without limiting them to a question on a survey.

Jamie agreed that's a great idea. Maybe we can work on those two things simultaneously; we'll work on the questions and make sure we have a good context to present it in.

Call Adjourned: 3:27 p.m.