

Submitted by: Keith E. Whitfield, Provost

ESTABLISHMENT OF A LAWSTART PROGRAM

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve the establishment of a LawStart Program, an accelerated BA/BS-JD program, effective Fall 2016.

Background

Accelerated law degree programs go by many names, such as "six year law degrees," "3+3 JD programs" or "BA/BS to JD programs." Typically, an accelerated law degree program is one in which students combine requirements of a bachelor's degree (a BA or BS) with requirements of the Juris Doctor (JD) degree. Students usually receive their bachelor's degree after completing the first full year of law school. Students ultimately complete the two degrees in six years rather than the usual seven. Many such programs exist (e.g., Georgia State University, Drexel University, and University of Pennsylvania, to name a few). Michigan State University is currently the only public university in Michigan to offer such a program. Wayne State Law School currently has an agreement with Oakland University that allows admission on a similarly accelerated basis to students enrolled in OU's integrative studies program. This proposed LawStart program will open up similar opportunities to Wayne State undergraduate students.

Like the WayneMD and MedStart programs and a few AGRADE (BA/BS to MA/MS) programs in CLAS and Engineering, this proposed program will create a new, collaborative, cross-college, undergraduate-to-graduate pipeline. This program also increases the Law School's ability to attract outstanding students from Wayne State's undergraduate students.

Program Description

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Honors College, and the Law School jointly developed this specialized BA/BS-JD degree program. The proposed LawStart Program will track highly-qualified undergraduates to complete their General Education, College, and Major requirements within approximately three years, during which time they will earn a minimum of 90 undergraduate credits. Students will then apply to enter Wayne State Law School for their fourth year of undergraduate education. Credits earned during the first year of law school will double-count to fulfill students' remaining undergraduate elective credit requirements. Students in the LawStart Program who are admitted to Wayne Law will receive the Bachelor's degree upon successful completion of all first-year law courses, normally at the end of the fourth year. They will receive the JD degree upon completion of all Law School coursework and other requirements, normally at the end of the sixth year.

Admission Requirements

Students will be eligible to apply for the LawStart Program in their sophomore year or upon completion of at least two full-time semesters and at least 24 but no more than 64 undergraduate credits. To qualify for admission to the LawStart program, students must first

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meet a cumulative GPA requirement of 3.5 or better in college-level coursework. LawStart application materials will also include a personal statement about future career goals, a resume, a graded writing sample from a college-level course, and at least three letters of recommendation. A LawStart selection committee will also require an interview for those students who make it to the final selection round. Approximately 10-15 students per year will join the LawStart program.

Admission to the LawStart program does not guarantee eventual acceptance by the Law School, which requires a separate application during the junior year of college. LawStart students must take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and meet the minimum requirements that the Wayne State Law School admissions committee establishes for incoming law students, as well as other admissions requirements, before they will be admitted to Wayne State Law School.

Curriculum Requirements

Once accepted into the LawStart program, students must:

- Maintain satisfactory progress toward completing their undergraduate coursework in three years.
- Maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. If students do not make satisfactory progress for two consecutive semesters, they may be removed from the LawStart program.
- Take the LSAT no later than midway through their final year of undergraduate study and apply for Wayne State Law School admission by January 15th of their junior year.
- Participate in LawStart enrichment activities.

Any student failing to meet these program requirements may be removed from the LawStart program at the discretion of the LawStart selection committee. Any student removed or who withdraws from the program will need to complete their final year of undergraduate studies and any remaining requirements in order to attain the Bachelor's degree.

Graduation Requirements

LawStart students will receive their Bachelor's degree after at least 120 credits and completion of all General Education, College and Major requirements. Acceptance to the LawStart program does not commit students to completing the JD degree. If a student is admitted to and enrolls in Wayne State Law School and if a student completes all necessary requirements of the JD degree, he or she will receive a JD degree after three years of full-time law school.

Program Administration

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will have administrative responsibility for the LawStart program, but will work closely with the Honors College, the Law School, and individual departments to select and advise students. In the initial years, the program will be administered by a LawStart committee, comprised of representatives from Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Honors College, the Law School, and one pre-law advisor from the University

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Advising Center. Depending on the progress of the LawStart program, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences may designate a Director of the LawStart program (potentially in year 3 or 4 of the program).

Budget and Resource Requirements

There are minimal initial costs associated with the creation of this program. If a Director is hired after the initial implementation years of the LawStart program, there may be a nominal stipend or cost of a course release.

Accreditation

No specialized accreditation is required or will be sought.

Approvals

The LawStart proposal was approved by the faculty and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the faculty and the Dean of the Law School, the Honors Council and the Dean of the Honors College, and the Provost.