

UM'S LAW WITHOUT WALLS PURSUES INTERNATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO LEGAL, BUSINESS PROBLEMS

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Students, lawyers, business leaders work in cooperative teams

Wojtec Zaluska, while a law student in Spain, worked on a computer program that could suggest additional resources based on research a lawyer does.

Lulia Hito, while a law student at University of Miami, worked on a digital platform to match law students with pro bono programs, an issue of significance to students in states that require pro bono hours before taking their bar exams.

Bar President John Stewart has worked on projects to help international start-up financial companies deal with various national regulatory requirements and to enhance law firm cyber security.

They were all participating in Law Without Walls, a program based at the University of Miami School of Law that brings together law and business students, lawyers, and business leaders from across the globe to address specific problems and come up with a “deliverable” — or specific solution.

“I wanted to do something that broke down the walls that existed in law both in the way we taught our students and in the way we work with business professionals and the way we collaborated,” said UM Law Professor Michele DeStefano, who founded Law Without Walls, or LWOW for short. The program will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2020.

“The short summary is they take both law students and other business graduate students and they have a set of universities from across the United States and around the world that participate,” said Stewart, who has been on LWOW teams for the past several years. “Then they take business leaders and thought leaders in business and

the law, and they divide up the students in teams. Each team gets law leaders, thought leaders, business leaders, and students and each team is assigned what they call a 'Project of Worth.'"

Students and professionals come from 35 countries, including Iceland, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Israel, China, Switzerland, Canada, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Guatemala, Lithuania, South Africa, and Argentina

The program has 16-week runs, with an in-person kickoff session either in the U.S. or Europe, and then virtual meetings to work on the problems, and a final meeting where the solution is presented.

"Our team's assigned topic was: 'Increasing Access to Justice and Creating New Models of Regulation: How Can the Two Go Hand-in-Hand?'" said Hito, who went on to an internship in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and then a job with the Eversheds Sutherland law firm before returning to UM to be acting director of LWOW.

"My team researched the possibility of applying neural network algorithms in the background of a lawyer's computer for the purpose of analyzing each task that the lawyer is carrying out, and suggesting relevant content to the lawyer which may assist with any given task," said Zaluska, a 2014 LWOW participant. "If the technology detects that a lawyer is preparing a negligence claim, it may suggest recent case law on negligence, flag limitation periods to initiate a court claim, provide the address of the competent court, etc. While back in 2014 this was a novel idea, nowadays several IT vendors are experimenting with this technology which is slowly entering the legal market."

Felix Schulte-Strathaus was getting his LL.M. at the University College of London when he participated in the 2016 LWOW.

"Our topic challenge was 'Underage and Underrepresented: How Can We Protect Youth From Cyberbullying?'" he said. "From our research, we concluded that the young LGBTQ+ community in particular is subject to disproportionate cyberbullying. To help the victims, we created a Facebook messenger chatbot with our Project of Worth... Through its chat interface, we wanted to make relevant resources on cyberbullying more accessible. To demonstrate its viability, I built the chatbot as a minimum viable product on the developer's platform of Facebook."

The result won that year's Viability Award and a demo video of the chatbot is on the LWOW website at <https://lwowlive.vids.io/videos/1c9adbb41d10ebcc94/amibot-commercial>.

Stewart has participated in several projects. Earlier this year, he worked on a team project, sponsored by Visa, that aimed to develop a computer program to help tech-based financial start ups navigate various countries' financial regulations. An earlier project focused on computer security (which he has applied to Bar work) and a computer program for smart phones to remind populations of upcoming court dates.

"The goal is not to necessarily build a profitable enterprise, it's to solve a problem," Stewart said. "But if you happen to build a profitable enterprise, that's great."

The top project for the most recent LWOW session, DeStefano said, came up with a computer program (called SmartSyndi) for managing the complex area of syndicated loans, which can involve several banks and lenders. The process will be more convenient and auditable "so that everybody, the clients and the banks, are more protected and happier."

Another project came up with a better system for corporate legal departments to prepare requests for proposals for outside legal counsel, she said. Other 2019 projects included providing legal services in rural areas, regulating drones, identifying and challenging fake news, helping "gig" workers understand their legal rights, and using tech and artificial intelligences to help immigrant families in the U.S.

While the problem solving is one focus, students also said the process is part of their education.

Schulte-Strathaus' team included lawyers from New York and Sao Paulo, a legal/tech project manager in London, and students from China, Australia, and Paris.

"Our team crossed four continents and seven time zones," he said.

Zaluska's team has "an in-house lawyer from Vodafone, a lawyer from Eversheds, another lawyer from Chile, a student from South Africa, and a founder from a tech start-up.

“The breadth of experience of our team was extremely helpful to analyze our business problem from different angles,” he said.

DeStefano said 60 percent of participants do not speak English as a first language, adding to the challenge.

“We were a diverse team situated in three very different time zones and were expected to schedule weekly meetings, provide meaningful updates both internally within our team and with the LWOW team, as well as produce quality deliverables along the way,” Lulia said. “Frankly, the logistics of trying to find a time to meet each week was a feat in itself, however this alone taught all of us valuable lessons about time management, intergenerational expectations, and behaviors of practicing attorneys.”

Zaluska said the program gave a broad perspective of international law problems.

“By way of example of the geographical extent of a single business venture — a new hospital may be built in Dubai, which is financed by a syndicate of banks from Hong Kong, France, and Luxembourg, and is built by a Spanish construction company, whose works are insured by an English insurance company, which re-insures the works to another insurer in Bermuda,” he said. “From the client’s perspective (e.g. the developer of the hospital), this requires a careful selection and coordination of an international legal team. If the lawyers on such team do not have the experience to instruct and narrow down adequately the relevant legal issues, then a lot of wasted time and legal fees would be the likely consequence.”

Stewart said the program has broadened his horizons as a veteran lawyer.

“You have to understand cultural differences. That’s almost as invaluable as the project itself,” he said. “It’s a great learning experience for me, but it’s a great experience for the students because you learn a whole variety of worthwhile tasks.”

Students said they remain in contact with their team members, even years after the LWOW program.

As LWOW approaches its 10th year, DeStefano said changes are being made.

Plans include a two-day intensive program, called LWOW Sprint, where teams of business professionals, lawyers, law students, and mentors will have 48 hours to address an issue. Leading up to the two-day session will be a virtual education program on “how to apply innovation in law with a global perspective,” she said.

The second change will be a modified version of the current program, where teams meet and are trained over a 16-week period to find creative solutions to problems.

The third component, DeStefano said, will be separate 90-minute seminars, called LWOW PopUps to address substantive and networking issues and “provide opportunities for the LWOW community to engage and educate each other.”

For more information about Law Without Walls, visit **www.law.miami.edu/academics/law-without-walls**.