

# Democratizing Legal Education

*Northwestern's MSL is one-of-a-kind in the U.S.*

BY LINDSAY PENTICUFF

**Main campus:**

Chicago

**Number of students:**

781

**Degrees offered:**

J.D., J.D.-MBA; J.D.-

Ph.D., J.D.-LLM, LLM,

LLM/K, MSL

**Website:**

[law.northwestern.edu](http://law.northwestern.edu)

**ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S TOP** law schools has launched a Master of Science in law program that is drawing interest from diverse students with backgrounds in STEM.

Launched the fall semester of 2014, Northwestern University's MSL program at the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law is unique in that it is the first law program in the United States designed exclusively for STEM-trained individuals, providing practical, hands-on training in the legal and business issues that directly pertain to scientific and technological innovation. Courses are offered in three main focuses: business law and entrepre-

neurship, intellectual property and patent design, and regulatory analysis and strategy. The curriculum was developed with substantive input from leaders in the business, legal, regulatory and entrepreneurship communities.

"This is the brainchild of a group of us who were trying to think about what we could do that might make a difference in the world and that would be different than the J.D. program that we're all familiar with and used to working on," says Leslie Oster, an attorney who has spent most of her career in legal education and came to Northwestern about five years ago to work on academic

**Participants in Northwestern's MSL program are a diverse group of students with various STEM backgrounds and work experience.**

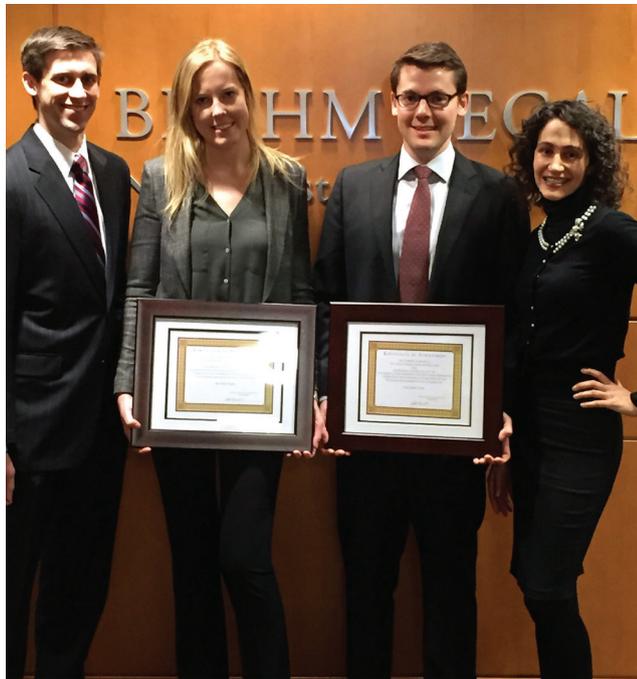


initiatives for the law school.

Oster, who is also a clinical associate professor of law, says her group has learned that a lot of STEM students have an interest in law, but don't want to become lawyers. "Three years of law school is a big commitment, so we started thinking of what we could do that might be different, and that's when we thought of the idea of identifying a market need... there are people out there in STEM fields who are interested in law and business and have a knack for it, but they don't have a program that they can go to that combines law and business skills; and something they could get through in a reasonable amount of time and money."

The master's degree program was built on the idea of meeting the needs of STEM students. "We wanted to bring in a diverse class, and we were focused on trying to teach them about the combination of law and business that we thought would be valuable in the marketplace... as opposed to more theoretical classes that you might get in a J.D. program," Oster adds.

Examples of jobs that graduates may accept after they complete the program include working in intellectual property, stepping into a managerial position, becoming a business analyst or even helping run clinical trials at a large pharmaceutical company. "One of the advantages of the program is that it helps you stand out from your peers, so if you're going into business management and you're wanting to stand out, the MSL is one way to do that," says Dr. Susan Dennehy, administrative director of the program. "The aim with this program is to create a new class of professionals who are very well equipped to serve as interlocutors. They can be the translator across the different areas — law, business, tech — they are the ones who understand all of those languages and all of



those perspectives, and they can really be the glue for that team."

There are 58 students currently enrolled in the program, with women making up 50 percent of program participants, and more than half are people of color. Of the students who entered in the fall 2015 semester, 38 percent are international, representing 13 countries. Twenty-six percent have seven or more years of work experience and 12 percent have doctoral degrees. In each year of the program, at least one military veteran has been enrolled.

"We think of this program as a way to democratize legal education," Oster says. "Law has been inaccessible to a lot of segments of the populations for a lot of reasons — it's very expensive, it's very credential conscious. For example, someone who has a GPA of 3.4 from the University of Illinois engineering program is amazing, but a 3.4 is not going to get you into a great law school. There's a lot of people out there who are very smart and who wouldn't otherwise have the chance to go and get a high quality legal education like the one that we can offer, but we feel like what makes it tick is the background and diversity of the students."

Students typically come from a variety of STEM backgrounds. "About one-third are from engineering, about one-third are from the life sciences and about one-third are from other STEM fields like chemistry, technology, etc.," Oster says.

Dennehy adds that it's been thrilling to work with such a new, diverse and energetic program. "It's a tremendous opportunity, as far as being able to shape the program and have an impact, and it's very exciting to see this expansion of legal education," she says. "Traditionally, there's always been just one game in town — the J.D.s — but there have always been many other professions and areas that have had a real need for knowing something about law, and STEM areas are a very obvious candidate for that." ■

#### BY THE NUMBERS:

- 82 percent of start-ups want to hire people with STEM skills
- 42 percent are looking for STEM workers with other business skills
- 87 percent say it's hard to find workers with the skills they want

Source: Northwestern University

◀ Amy Garber (right) participated in the 2015 Transactional Law meet. Her team placed second overall for their written contract and negotiation for simulated M&A transaction.

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— LESLIE OSTER,  
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PRITZKER SCHOOL  
OF LAW