

Education anywhere

The technology behind online LL.M. programs continues to get better, offering students more options and a better learning experience

BY LAIRA MARTIN

Graduate law students from all over the world are enrolling in online LL.M. programs to access American legal education at their convenience, and law schools are turning to a variety of technologies to create a rigorous educational experience.

"What I've learned in the last 20 years in online education ... is students come out able to perform in a workplace," said Professor William Byrnes, associate dean for graduate and distance-education programs at Thomas Jefferson School of Law.

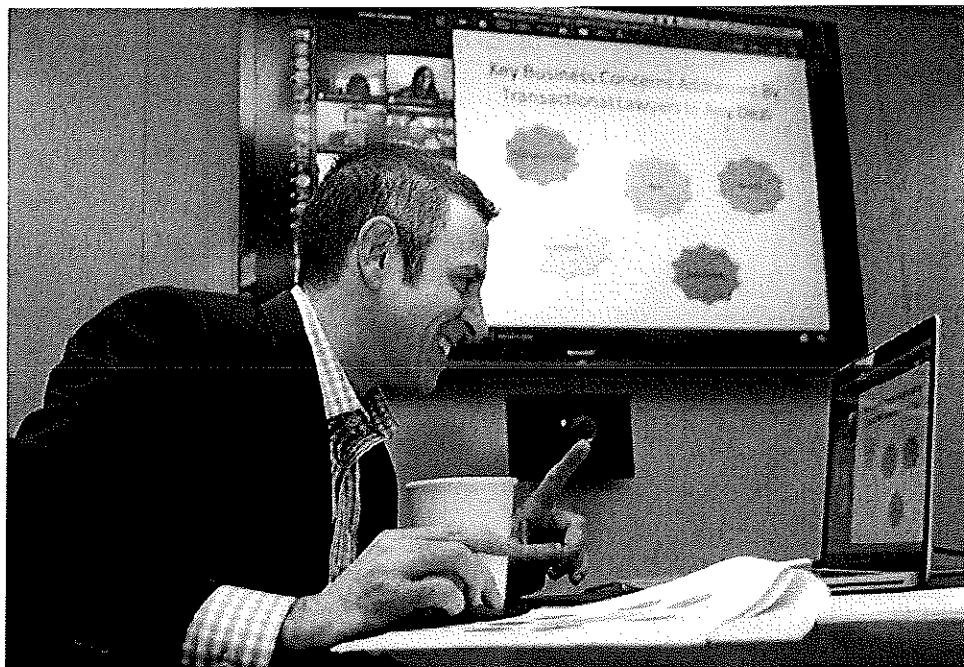
Byrnes created the first online LL.M. at an ABA-accredited school in 1994. He said there are two reasons why schools should pursue online graduate programs. First, it helps law schools with enrollment, because it opens the doors for students who otherwise could not take such programs. Second, it increases the employment prospects for graduates by better preparing them for an ever-changing digital world.

"If you extract technology out of the equation, you choose to ignore what the employer requires," Byrnes said. "Your students come out with their arms tied behind their backs trying to get employment."

Nearly 30 law schools offer more than 40 LL.M. programs, either solely online or in combination with residential courses. And the number increases every year.

Still, Byrnes said there are many naysayers when it comes to online learning. Roberta Flowers, co-director of Stetson University College of Law's Center for Excellence in Elder Law, was hesitant about distance learning before launching an online elder law LL.M. in 2007.

"When I first started, I was very reluctant but curious to see how well an [online] discussion board would actu-



University of Southern California Gould School of Law Professor Donald Scotten teaches an online Business Organizations course to international students.

ally generate discussion," she said. "The students ended up being more engaged online than they may have been in class. It's been a real eye-opener for me."

Professors communicate with students through chat rooms, video chat and discussion boards. Some programs also offer podcasts and access to online law librarians.

"The most valuable tool we use, and probably the most surprising, is our discussion boards," Flowers said. "Students are required to post answers and questions every week. Engagement, in some ways, has been more than we see in a typical J.D. class. They can't spend the whole semester not speaking in class because

they are required to put pen to paper."

Online LL.M. programs take many forms. There's synchronous communication, where classes are taught in real time, and asynchronous communication, allowing students to access courses at their convenience.

University of Southern California Gould School of Law launched its first online LL.M. program in American law in the fall. It is primarily asynchronous with one live video class per week. Anne Marlenga, director of student affairs for graduate and international programs, said students chose her program for its convenience. Students are spread across nine countries including Brazil, Kuwait and

Nigeria. Though timing may be difficult at times, students responded positively to the weekly live sessions.

"What's interesting is students have chosen the online program because it allows flexibility to be asynchronous, but they have all remarked about the live conference session being the most interesting, helpful and enjoyable for them," she said. "Some students are sitting at their desks at work, and some stay up until 11 p.m. to attend class."

Almost all of the students in USC's online LL.M. program work full time in their home countries as practicing lawyers or in legal departments of businesses. Taking time off to study in Los Angeles is not an option for most, Marlena said.

"Our residential program is two semesters [in L.A.], and there's no way around it," she said. "It's easier [for online students] to work around their lives, whereas residentially, you come to USC full time for a year or you don't come at all."

USC uses Moodle, just one example of a host of software used in online education, often in combination with video

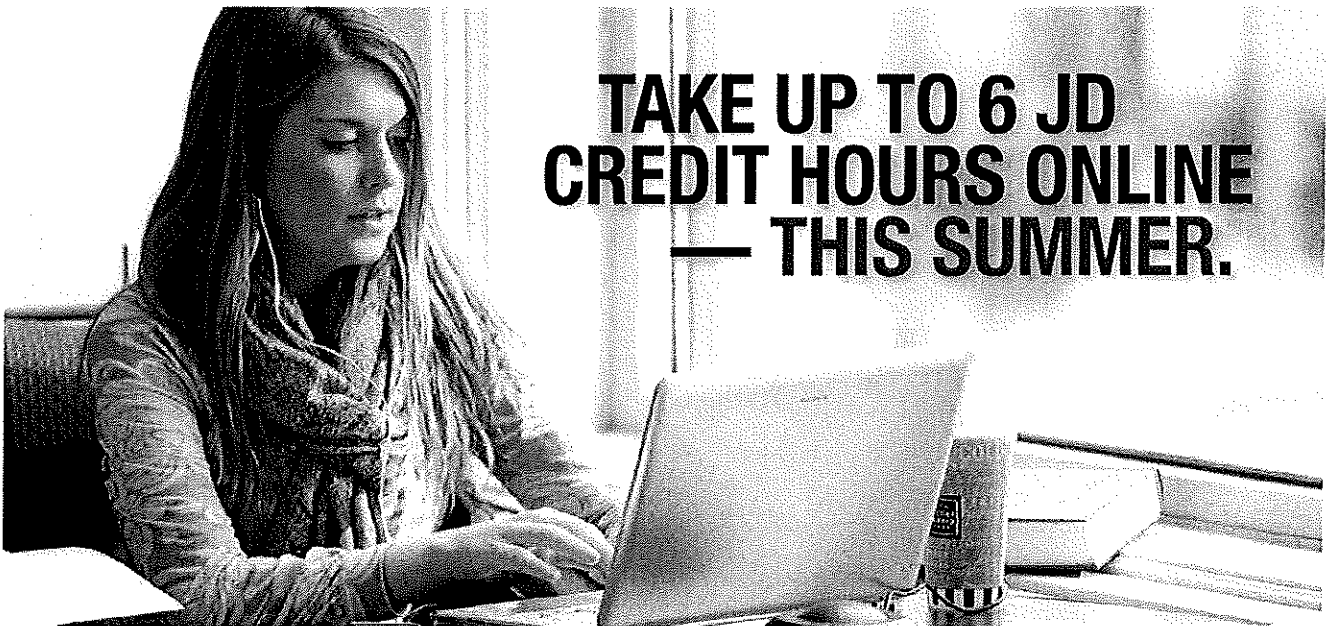
chat programs such as Skype to achieve face-to-face contact.

"The Moodle platform seems to have so many functionalities where professors

can do interactive quizzes, interactive PowerPoints, videos and live sessions," Marlena said. "There's a variety of things they're doing, and it's not like what we're

Law Schools with online LL.M. programs

American University	International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law
Atlanta's John Marshall	Labor and Employment Law; American Legal Studies
Boston University	Taxation; International Business Law
Chapman University	Prosecutorial Science
Florida Coastal School of Law	U.S. Law; Transportation and Logistics
Georgetown University	Executive LL.M. in Taxation
Loyola University Chicago	Health Law
Michigan State University	Global Food Law
New York University	Executive LL.M. in Taxation
Regent University	American Legal Studies
Stetson University	Advocacy; Elder Law
Temple University	Taxation
The John Marshall	Intellectual Property Law; Employee Benefits; Estate Planning; Real Estate Law
Thomas Jefferson	International Taxation & Financial Services



**TAKE UP TO 6 JD
CREDIT HOURS ONLINE
— THIS SUMMER.**

John Marshall offers more online JD and LLM courses than any law school in the nation.

With more than 50 ABA-accredited online JD and cross-listed LLM courses to choose from, John Marshall makes it easy to earn up to 15 credit hours toward your JD degree on your own schedule. **Apply now for summer 2015.**

► Visit <http://edegrees.jmls.edu> or call 312.427.2737 ext. 775.



used to with [older] online education with just videotaped classroom.”

Program directors also report using Blackboard Learn, Echo360, Adobe

Connect, Desire2Learn and Camtasia. Byrnes said each one offers something different.

Dr. Ian Pilarczyk is the director of the

Executive LL.M. in international business law at Boston University School of Law, which combines distance and residential learning. Pilarczyk has yet to find one software system that has all the necessary features, so he uses a combination of tools and platforms including Blackboard, Echo360 and Adobe Connect.

“A lot of systems are clunky and not necessarily intuitive,” he said. “You have to combine a variety of technologies to do what you want to do. You can use any one of them adequately but there will always be something you feel is missing.”

Boston University also offers an online tax LL.M., which is well suited for the online medium, Pilarczyk said.

“It’s easier to teach a specialized field online,” he said. “Tax firms were open to the idea of people learning by distance. The subject lends itself well to the online platform.”

Online classes have proved effective for Stetson University’s elder law LL.M. because of students’ prior experience and interest in the specialization.

“It’s really very, very adept at working

University of Alabama	Concentration in Business Transactions; Concentration in Taxation
University of Arkansas	Agricultural & Food Law
University of Connecticut	Insurance Law
University of Denver	Taxation
University of Miami	Real Property Development; Taxation of Cross-Border Investment
University of Mississippi	Air and Space Law
University of Nebraska	Space, Cyber and Telecommunications Law
University of New Hampshire	Intellectual Property; International Criminal Law & Justice
University of Pittsburgh	U.S. Law
USC Gould School of Law	American Law
Vermont Law School	Energy Law; Environmental Law; Natural Resources
Villanova University	Taxation
Washington University	U.S. Law
WMU- Cooley	Intellectual Property; Taxation; Corporate Law & Finance; Insurance Law; Homeland and National Security Law
Western New England	Closely Held Businesses; Estate Planning and Elder Law

The best thing for your resume since spellcheck.

An **online LL.M.** concentration in Tax or Business from the University of Alabama School of Law is the best way to improve your resume since spellcheck. The degree demonstrates you received skill-based training from respected professors and practitioners throughout the country. It also proves you understand the innovation of an exceptional program offered through live, interactive technologies and the value of an affordable program delivered to you anywhere on the globe. An LL.M. from Alabama says it all. Visit www.AlabamaLLM.com/jurist to learn more.

Online LL.M. degree programs
Tax and Business Law Concentrations



www.AlabamaLLM.com/jurist

More Opportunity

LL.M.

Estate Planning
Entertainment, Arts & Sports*
International Law
International Arbitration
Inter-American Law (Law of the Americas)
Ocean & Coastal
Real Property Development
Taxation
Taxation of Cross-Border Investment
Transnational Law for Foreign Lawyers

*Subject to ABA acquiescence and the UM Board of Trustees approval.

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS:

www.law.miami.edu/llm



in specialty areas because it allows for collaboration among people who are very immersed in that specialty area," Flowers said. "Students share what is going on in their own practices and use it as both a study group and a real resource."

In addition to specialized courses, Byrnes said, online courses are effective for programs with an international focus because of the Internet's ability to eliminate physical barriers.

"For me, it started with international tracks for curricular reasons," he said. "I wanted perspectives from all around the world, and the only effective way was through distance education."



William Byrnes, a law professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, teaches a class online using Blackboard software.

LL.M. anywhere



What will you be doing while waiting for bar exam results?

Whether you'll be working 8-to-5 or hunting for that first full-time attorney position, Stetson's online LL.M. degree programs in Advocacy and Elder Law can help you stand out among peers of similar work experience.

- Designed for practicing attorneys with flexibility to access courses any time or place
- Nationally recognized professors in the fields of advocacy and elder law
- Earn your LL.M. in less than 2 years



STETSON LAW

INTERESTED? Visit stetson.edu/advocacyllm or stetson.edu/elderlawllm

Byrnes is a proponent of hybrid programs that combine distance and residential learning, such as USC's four-week on-campus Summer Law & English Program.

"Hybrid programs are great," he said. "Don't burn brick-and-mortar methods. Leverage what it is great at doing — like creating social relationships — and use technology for other aspects."

As for the future, professors are confident that technological advancements will make things even better. Flowers said she would like to see an increase in interaction, though she does not know what form that will take.

"We're always trying to improve interactions," she said. "I don't know what that would look like as far as the technology. Unfortunately, I don't have a crystal ball."

Byrnes is confident about the current state of online education, but it is the future he is looking forward to.

"Five years from now, it'll be more amazing," he said.