MEMORANDUM

TO: Jennifer Henfey, Board Liaison

FROM: Melissa Berry, Chair and Legal Master’s Programs Interest Group

CC: Fred Thrasher, Deputy Director
    Claire Nash, Member Services Coordinator

DATE: October 24, 2019

RE: Legal Master’s Programs Interest Group Second Quarterly Board Report

During the second quarter of the 2019-2020 NALP business cycle, the Legal Master’s Programs Interest Group continued its work and engaged in a productive strategic planning feedback process and second quarterly call. This report summarizes the Interest Group’s activities and environmental scanning conducted on our most recent quarterly call. Overall, Interest Group members seem to value the opportunity to connect with others working in this space and to have practical takeaways from the discussions.

I. Strategic Planning

The group held a special strategic planning call to discuss the Board of Directors’ and the Strategic Planning Advisory Group’s questions. We also collected written feedback from members and those working with legal master’s programs. This feedback was presented in a memorandum dated September 13, 2019 from the Interest Group.

II. Second Quarterly Call

Approximately 12 members (including at least one new member) and interested parties participated on the group’s second quarterly call on October 17, 2019. The Interest Group Chair sent notice of the call to members and to individuals working in legal master’s programs who expressed interest in participating. Staff from the University of Pennsylvania Law School have been consistently participating since the 2019 NALP Annual Education meeting.

A. Introduction and Board Report Strategic Planning Update & Board Report

The call began with a brief introduction by the Interest Group Chair. Our Board Liaison, Jennifer Henfey, then provided a Board report and update about the timeline for the strategic planning process.
B. Environmental Scanning

For this quarterly call, the Interest Group, focused on two previously identified discussion topics for environmental scanning. Scanning was split into a “Hot Topics” discussion about employment outcomes and a “Sharing Spotlight” discussion about resources and programming.

1. Hot Topics: Employment Outcomes

Call participants had a robust discussion about the ability to identify goals of legal master’s students and to track their employment outcomes. Hurdles such as the part-time nature of the programs and the focus on working professionals were explored. One school shared information about their pre-admission procedure with individuals interested in pursuing the degree to ensure the student’s reason for wanting to enroll meets the goals of program. Several members noted that their schools allow legal master’s students access to 12Twenty or their career services platform, which led to a discussion about whether legal master’s students are competing with JD students for JD Advantage jobs. One consistent theme was managing expectations.

2. Sharing Spotlight: Resources and Programming

The theme of managing expectation carried over to the Sharing Spotlight segment of the call. During this segment, participants shared information about resources and programs they created or adapted for legal master’s students. Some participants work exclusively with legal master’s students; others work primarily with JD students and legal master’s students have been added to their portfolio (but not necessarily with additional staffing or financial resources). The discussion identified some approaches to efficiently serving this population of students as well as challenges, including general programs with many possible career pathways.

C. Future Discussion Topics

At the end of the call, we identified discussion topics for the third quarterly call. Participants expressed an interest in discussing employer outreach, educating employers about legal master’s programs and the value of the degree, and service delivery for legal master’s students, who are primarily part-time, and, in some cases, not on campus.

IV. Outreach & Membership Development

Following the call, the Interest Group Chair reached out contacts at Arizona State University to inquire about the dates of the Fourth Annual Legal Master’s Programs Conference, which will be hosted by ASU. The conference is set for March 2020, and the dates were shared with the Interest Group through NALPConnect. Registration information and further details will be shared through NALPConnect as they become available.
This is a good opportunity to partner with the loosely organized group of law school faculty and staff. It also presents an opportunity for Interest Group members to get involved in conference planning, speaking, attending, or otherwise connecting with conference participants. Additionally, it is a prime opportunity to increase the scope and number of the Interest Group’s membership.