

MILBANK GROOMS MIDDLELEVEL ASSOCIATES FOR SUCCESS AT HARVARD

MP McQueen

The thought of returning to law school just a few years after graduation would fill many young lawyers with dread. But for midlevel associates Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy, a unique training program at Harvard Law School has become a prized rite of passage.

"Law school doesn't give you what you really need to know as a transactional lawyer," said David Wolfson, a corporate M&A partner at the firm who chairs its professional development committee. The Milbank@Harvard program, Wolfson said, fills in the gaps for young corporate lawyers and litigators alike, teaching practical business of law lessons beyond theory and practice.

At the same time, the program has helped to build greater camaraderie and trust among lawyers spread across a dozen Milbank offices in the U.S., Europe and Asia, Wolfson said.

Held on the law school's campus in Cambridge four or five times a year, Milbank@Harvard brings together about 30 associates with law firm partners and Harvard Law and Harvard Business School faculty.



Harvard's J. Gunnar Trumball lectures midlevel associates at a Milbank@Harvard training session at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Mass., November 2015.

The associates—including lateral hires—attend weeklong classes designed to teach what law school usually doesn't: business and finance fundamentals. Topics include how to read financial statements, accounting and finance, elements of macroeconomics, competitive strategy, negotiation and marketing, along with personal development and leadership workshops.

Norbert Rieger, global head of Milbank's corporate group in Munich,

first proposed the Milbank@Harvard program, Wolfson said. Twenty events have been held since its start in 2011.

Some law schools, such as New York University School of Law, have added a range of business subjects to their curricula over the years, and many schools offer joint MBA/J.D. programs. But for associates with liberal arts or science backgrounds—like Mike Sheen, a fourth-year patent litigation

associate in Milbank's Los Angeles office who studied molecular and cell biology—the Harvard program may be their first exposure to formal instruction in many business topics. The training offered at Harvard gave Sheen “a big picture understanding of the world and the economy and individual companies,” he said.

The Milbank@Harvard program is unique in its focus on teaching law firm associates applied business skills, said Scott Westfahl, faculty director of executive education and professor of practice at Harvard Law School.

“I don't know of another program like this,” Westfahl said. It is administered in conjunction with the Harvard Law School Executive Education Program, which was founded by professors David Wilkins and Ashish Nanda about eight years ago.

Milbank declined to say how much the Milbank@Harvard program costs the firm. When the program was launched in 2011, one expert estimated the expense at roughly \$5.8 million per year.

Many of the Milbank@Harvard workshops are interactive. When an American Lawyer reporter visited one of the classes this fall, Harvard law and business professor Guhan Subramanian broke the group into teams for a game designed to demonstrate negotiation strategies. There are also meals and receptions, as well as two formal dinners in Boston and Cambridge. It adds up to a learning and networking event that young lawyers throughout Milbank have come to eagerly anticipate, according to firm leaders and associates.

Milbank's chairman, Scott Edelman, recently attributed the firm's improvement in The American Lawyer's annual midlevel satisfaction survey at least partly to the Milbank@Harvard program's success. Milbank rose to sixth place from 91st in the 2015 survey.

Zoe Mernick-Levene, a third-year litigator in the London office, said she appreciated the sessions on negotiating strategy and the chance to connect with colleagues from across the globe. “It does a brilliant job of connecting you with your peers and letting you know what Milbank is about and helping to start building relationships in an organic way,” she said. And, Mernick-Levene said, it “shows a real investment” in associates by the firm.

Laura Larsen, a fourth-year leveraged finance associate in Milbank's New York office, attended her first Milbank@Harvard session in early November. She said that during her first three years at Milbank she kept thinking, “When do I get to go to Harvard?”

Though her practice and education had already made her familiar with much of the subject matter, Larsen said the business and finance instruction really resonated “because we have been practicing a few years and have work under our belts.”

Benjamin Sayagh, a sixth-year associate who's also in the leveraged finance group in New York, said he especially appreciated the management training.

“By the time you get to the fourth or fifth year, you are managing a lot of paralegals and others, and there

are very good lessons on how to manage other people so that you are effective,” Sayagh said.

According to Harvard's Westfahl, the learning goes both ways. The program also helps partners and faculty understand the new cohort of lawyers, Westfahl said, including “how generational differences can be expected to affect their work environments in the future, and what this next generation is expecting.”

Wolfson agrees. “I think law schools need insight into what legal training is required for lawyers who practice in law firms, and this program allows them to address that need,” he said. It also allows the firm “to appropriately address the training needs for the upcoming generation of lawyers,” he said.

Alicia Bove, a sixth-year litigator in New York, who attended her first module in November 2013, said the program gave her the vocabulary and confidence to get quickly up to speed on new matters. But “more generally, just adopting the perspective of how a person who is running a business is looking at a matter, as opposed to how a lawyer is looking at it, is helpful,” Bove said.

“It wasn't something I was thinking about before attending Milbank@Harvard,” Bove said. “It is a fantastic program.”