

Opportunity & Community— What's New at SLO College of Law & How to Help Students Thrive

by Erica Flores Baltodano,
San Luis Obispo College of Law Campus Dean

Images courtesy of SLO College of Law

For better or worse, you probably remember your law school experience well. It likely included endless hours of reading, outlining, and studying. Opportunities for intellectually stimulating classroom discussions, I hope. Perhaps a clinical course or internship, and probably a moot court competition too. Students at San Luis Obispo College of Law (SLOCL) are provided these opportunities and more right here in our community.

An Opportunity Law School

SLOCL offers evening classes for individuals who work full time or have caretaking responsibilities during the day but want to pursue a legal degree at night. For those who have dreamed of a legal education, but have roots, jobs, spouses or kids in San Luis Obispo County, SLOCL is both accessible and affordable.

In addition to in-person evening classes, we offer an online hybrid option for students who live in more remote areas of the county or otherwise cannot access our Broad Street campus just north of SLO Regional Airport. And unlike most law schools, bar exam prep fees and coursework are built into our reasonable tuition rates.

Accessibility and affordability make SLOCL an opportunity law school. SLOCL is one of a small family of nonprofit California-accredited law schools affiliated with Monterey College of Law, which has been educating California attorneys and judges for more than 50 years. Other campuses are located in Bakersfield (Kern County College of Law) and Santa Rosa (Empire College of Law).

Our student body is diverse in all ways, spanning a wide age range and range of lifetime experiences. Some of our students recently obtained a bachelor's or associate degree, and others are embarking on a second career. Most of our students



SLOCL alumni and graduates participated in Law Day at the Courthouse in 2023.

intend to practice to law, but some are pursuing a legal degree to enhance their current career and skillset. A majority of our students are women or students of color, some represent the LGBTQ+ community, and many are first-generation law students.

And they are incredible. I cannot fathom making my way through law school while balancing a full-time job and a family, but that is precisely what most of our students accomplish. They have no choice but to develop good time management skills, a strong work ethic and tenacity. Our students work for local law firms and government agencies during and after law school, build successful solo practices, and often return to SLOCL as mentors, academic advisors or professors because they feel compelled to give back.

A Community-Based Law School

That so many of our graduates give back in this way is not surprising. In addition to providing a quality, accessible legal education in a community-based setting, our mission is to produce graduates who are dedicated to professional excellence, integrity and community service.

SLOCL's commitment to training legal professionals dedicated to community service is one reason our students are required to complete clinical coursework serving members of the community under the supervision of a licensed attorney Professor. SLOCL students enroll in the SLO Immigration Law Clinic, Clean Slate Clinic (offered in collaboration with California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation and People's Justice Project), SLO Mediation Clinic (offered in collaboration with Wilshire Creative Mediation), or any number of other law school clinics providing free legal services where the Monterey College of Law family of law schools have a presence.

In addition to serving our community through our clinical program, SLOCL is a community-based law school because local attorneys and bench officers serve as faculty. Intentionally small class sizes foster deep learning and meaningful relationships with classmates and professors. During law school, students begin networking with members of our local legal profession. Nearly all our graduates remain in SLO County, which means classmates and professors quickly become colleagues.

Support from our local legal community has been tremendous. Many of our faculty members have been teaching at SLOCL for years, and I have been overwhelmed by the numbers of local attorneys and judges who have reached out to me about teaching a class at SLOCL or conducting a seminar or workshop. I work as quickly as possible to meet with prospective faculty members and then connect them with our Dean of Academic Affairs when positions become available.



Dean Baltodano (seated center) with members of the SLOCL Advisory Board in December 2023.



Internship Spotlight Program takes place at SLOCL March 8, 2024.

On March 8, SLOCL is hosting an "Internship Spotlight" program for students with several local employers to demystify the internship application process, learn how to earn course credit for internships, and shine a light on local internship opportunities for law students. Local attorneys have generously agreed to attend and share about the internships they offer. If successful, this event will be replicated annually to showcase different employers each year.

In addition to teaching in-person or online and offering internships, local attorneys and judges regularly share their wisdom and their time as guest speakers at the law school and serve as members of the SLOCL Advisory Board, which I chair. The Advisory Board is comprised of representatives of local institutions of higher education (Cal Poly, Cuesta and Alan Hancock) and the local legal community. I cannot think of a single attorney or bench officer who has declined an invitation to engage with our students as a speaker or panelist or serve on the Advisory Board, and for this I am tremendously grateful.

I try to press upon students the benefits of professional networking, particularly in our small community, and I encourage them to practice by joining a local bar association while they are still students. The San Luis Obispo County Bar

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