The Career Development and Law Practice Center is undergoing changes. A new director, Monique M. Garsaud, J.D. ’97, was hired in late February 2012. In accordance with Dean Maria Pabon-Lopez’s enunciated goals of providing students with experiential learning opportunities and producing practice ready graduates, the Center has begun to reassess its programs, policies and structure. Although some of the systems in place are sound, others are not, as they are inefficient and do not serve the students in the most meaningful way.

The overarching theme for this academic year is that the Center’s success and the students’ success are interdependent. The former does not occur without the latter. Our goal is to engage the student early in his/her law school time (optimally at the beginning of the second semester of his/her first year) to begin the discussion about how to develop a career. We view our roles not only as resource providers, but as good listeners tasked with asking probative questions. We know each student is unique with individual needs.

The first task the Center is undertaking is to streamline our approach when it comes to communicating with students and counseling students. Currently, counselors are assigned by class, i.e. a 1L counselor, 2L counselor, etc., and counseling sessions are scheduled by each counselor on individual calendars. Often, hand-written notes are recorded after each session and kept by each counselor. After a four month assessment, this has been deemed as inefficient, and leads to duplicity and to miscommunication. To address this, beginning in August 2012, counselors will be assigned to specific students and will counsel each student throughout the student’s duration at the law school. This will lead to a deeper and more meaningful relationship between the student and his/her counselor, and each student session will become a building block for the following session. After each counseling session, each counselor is charged with providing each student with a short list of goals to accomplish. Ultimately, the partnership of counselor and student will develop a well-thought out career development plan for the student.

In addition, we are creating one calendar system to be used by all within the Center that will record student appointments, on-campus interviews, career forums, etc. Lastly, the Center is being trained properly on the CSO Interface system (“CSI”), a web-based product that enables the Center to streamline and automate processes, including student/employer data, resume building, employment listings, important employment deadlines, mass emailing, and surveys. Although the Center has used CSI for some time, its capabilities have not been utilized. By using one tool for many tasks, the Center should be able to provide the students with one, consistent message, and have one place to which all students can go for information.

In conjunction with our use of CSI, we will be creating a “student profile” for each student that will track the career development of each student and will contain notes as to each communication with the student (as opposed to each counselor keeping her set of notes on each student without any one resource that contains such information.) It will also allow the counselors to have up-to-date information on each student that is stored in one location.
The Center is also seeking to establish a protocol of “what to do” and “available opportunities” for each year in law school, i.e. 1L to focus on resume drafting, cover letter, identifying interests and obtaining summer employment; 2L to focus on honing interests, experiential learning, obtaining summer employment, receiving information on the clinic, the skills curriculum, externships and judicial clerkships; 3L to focus on experiential learning, bar prep and obtaining employment. This will be addressed in a mid-year meeting with each class. Currently, in partnership with the Skills Department, we are crafting an agenda for the mid-year meeting for 1L’s, which is termed a “convocation”, at which we will be administering the Keirsey Temperament Sorter, (or something akin) to enable students to begin to identify their interests, strengths and weaknesses.

In addition, we seek to increase student foot traffic in the Center. Because the Center is not located in the main law school building, we have found many students do not know where the Center is located. To address this, we are converting an office space within the Center to a student lounge where we will have a coffee/snack area and resource board where postings on fellowships and other employment opportunities will be listed. We are also working on short video clips for each counselor to send out to their respective students at beginning of the semester as an introduction and invitation to come to the Center.

We continue to monitor employment statistics as posted by the ABA, NALP and other entities for the local area and nationally. While all schools are faced with an ever-shrinking job market, our aim is to support the administration’s goal to produce practice ready students by developing as many relationships with potential employers, both legal and non-legal, who can provide our students with meaningful work during their law school tenure.

Last, we aim to be environmentally sound in the Center. We are working on procedures to reduce the amount of paper, binders, etc. that are utilized and to reduce the manual entry of information. For instance, 3L students have been filling out their Exit Surveys by hand, hand-delivered to the Center and then the information is transferred manually onto the respective NALP and ABA reports. This is laborious and cumbersome for all involved. In conjunction with efforts with the main campus, and under the direction of Andy Piacun, the Center is finalizing a system that will allow everything, from student input to issuing the reports, to be performed electronically. This change will save an enormous amount of energy and personnel hours.

In sum, there are many exciting changes occurring in the Center. We believe the next few years will be challenging, but exciting, as it will require creativity and ingenuity.