

Expand Your Horizon through an LL.M. Programme

The LL.M. is a critical component of a modern lawyer's portfolio.

Virtually every recent public controversy in India has showcased problems with some set of legal provisions or the other. Among the public law issues to garner front-page news include debates on the freedom of speech in the *Kanhaiya Kumar* sedition case, the lowering of the age limit for the application of criminal law to juveniles in the aftermath of the *Nirbhaya* case and the responsibilities of organizations such as the *Art of Living Foundation* when conducting public events in areas vulnerable to environmental degradation. These issues have brought out the problems lawyers face today in articulating issues of public concern, conducting credible research to understand the complexity of legal disputes and in intervening effectively to resolve critical public policy issues through legal means. To a large extent, the failure of lawyers to engage successfully with India's public policy issues is as much the failure of legal education in India.

There are three critical problems with legal education today and a rigorous post-graduate degree in law can go a long way in remedying these problems.

- **First, law schools, despite their courses on jurisprudence and political theory, no longer appear to be the kinds of places where students can reflect critically on the moral role of the law and its relationship to equity and justice.** This is a serious problem for students who are fascinated by the idea that law can make a difference to the moral and ethical life of a society. These students want to reflect on the theoretical foundations of the law and explore the relationship of law to broader issues in human development, including ideas borrowed from economics, history, anthropology and sociology. They are looking for intellectual approaches to law that look at law as a moral domain and an inter-disciplinary domain. Unfortunately, such approaches are in short supply in legal education today.
- **Second, law schools must engage more with the empirical or what might be called the experiential aspects of law.** Law schools tend to impart a purely doctrinal or rule based version of the law that provides the misleading impression that the law is an autonomous discipline that consists of a set of rules derived from statutes and case law. However, this is not the manner in which law is interpreted and engaged by the real world. To understand law in its real world milieu, we must necessarily rely on the research methods already employed in the social sciences and we must expect every law student to graduate with an effective understanding of law as it is practiced in the society. Similarly we must expect our students to gain another ability: to effectively intervene in the society by way of both policy interventions and the monitoring and implementation of legislation and case law. To expose students to this aspect of their legal education, postgraduate law programmes focus on clinical programmes in the law. Clinical programmes ask the students to develop a supervised systematic intervention in varied areas relating to human rights, governance and public policy. Once again, the undergraduate law curriculum at our law schools has paid scant attention to developing successful clinical programmes that are fully committed to enhancing students' experiential understanding of the law.
- **Finally, lawyers ought to be both effective researchers and persuasive writers.** Writing thoughtfully, critically and convincingly about a complex issue of legal policy, for example, the problems with the introduction of a uniform civil code in India, requires a great deal of careful analysis and synthesis that can only come with practice and one to one supervision by someone who has worked through

these kinds of issues. A postgraduate degree in law can provide opportunities for dissertations dedicated to developing this ability in students. LL.M. dissertations focus on legal writing as an integral part of the lawyers' intervention in society.

While there are many specialized LL.M. courses offered abroad, LL.M. courses offered by the National Law Universities and by private universities such as Azim Premji University are gaining in popularity among lawyers and law students. Azim Premji University offers a LL.M. in Law and Development (starting July 2016) that intends to bring to post graduate legal education a conceptual, interdisciplinary and research focused study.

Careers in LL.M. Programme

LL.M. graduates, particularly in the human rights and development fields, can choose from a wide variety of careers in human rights, public policy decision-making and public administration.

- They can provide strategic advice to governments as well as consulting firms on complex issues of public policy.
- LL.M. graduates can expect to be of interest to firms looking to manage the complicated corporate social responsibility programmes mandated under the law.
- The LL.M. also enables students to pursue an academic career in law. There is a great dearth of good law teachers in the country and the supply-demand gap is going to increase exponentially in the coming years.

The LL.M. awaits students who are interested in using the law as a medium of social change to achieve justice and equity. A good LL.M. has courses that would whet the students' appetite for jurisprudence, law and social change, legal research and writing, and would make students a better, more socially aware lawyer overall. Students will be challenged to read closely, argue convincingly, research comprehensively and write precisely; a combination of these skills would make a LL.M. graduate both a competent and a committed lawyer.

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