

Simpson Thacher Launches New Associate Training Program

Simpson Thacher & Bartlett is partnering with Columbia Business School, hoping to speed new associates' ascent up the legal and business learning curve they'll face at the firm.

BY MEGHAN TRIBE

SIMPSON Thacher & Bartlett is partnering with Columbia Business School to launch a training program for its new fall associates, aiming to prepare its incoming classes to tackle complex legal work earlier and more efficiently.

Beginning Sept. 26, all of the firm's 111 incoming fall associates will gather at Simpson Thacher's New York City office for an eight-day intensive orientation dubbed "STBReady."

The idea for this new approach germinated over a year ago at a Simpson Thacher partner retreat, said William Dougherty, chairman of Simpson Thacher's executive committee.

Given the evolution of the legal market and the changing nature of the work for junior associates, the firm decided that it needed to place more of a pointed focus on associate training and development to get its associates up the skill curve a lot faster, Dougherty said.

"We needed to get better, more sophisticated and more advanced work down to our younger lawyers faster and give them the tools to do that kind of work more quickly out of the box," said Dougherty, who was named chair of the firm in 2013.

Simpson Thacher's new programming will include business and financial literacy training in conjunction with Columbia Business School.

It will also use actual transactions and disputes as case studies, with new

associates working alongside partners. The aim is to expose associates to the type of work they will be doing in different practice areas, and how each piece fits into an overall client engagement.

"We will take them through in a very hands-on way to show them the roles that they will be playing on a transaction like that," Dougherty said.

The firm emphasized that the new training comes on top of the intensive industry and practice-specific training that its associates already receive during their first months and years on the job.

Previously, Simpson Thacher's onboarding for its associates consisted of a two-day training held in its offices across the country. This is the first time that all of its associates will gather in one place for this new eight-day training, a strategy that Dougherty hopes will promote firmwide comradery.

"We need them helping their colleagues out, being team players and helping each other advance up the learning curve together," Dougherty said.

Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy currently partners with Harvard Law School to provide its associates with additional business, finance and legal training, and Simpson Thacher's new initiative comes at a time when many law firms are making structural changes to their talent pipelines and training and mentoring regimes.

Late last month, Reed Smith announced a new series of initiatives for its associates that includes an app-based feedback process, a "ramp up" program for



attorneys returning from leave and the opportunity to work at one of its many offices around the globe. Weil, Gotshal & Manges, looking to stem the exit of its senior associates, announced plans to shorten the length of its partner track by two years next year.

Dougherty said "STBReady" is just part of a broader slate of initiatives—including an overhaul of the firm's coaching and mentoring program—that are all designed to make the firm's associates better lawyers.

"It's something that we're going to continually revisit and refresh, because these associates are the single best, greatest asset at the firm and we've got to put the time, effort and thought into it," Dougherty said.

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