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Letter to the Editors: Law and Law

Richard Henry Seamon

Your supposed life partner has just told you that s/he wants to call it quits. You ask why, and s/he says, "We've grown apart; we have so little in common." The lines are timeworn, but s/he says them sincerely, and now s/he is gone. In your hectic response to being newly unconnected, you revamp. You join a gym; you get dental work. You take night courses for singles to learn a foreign language and pottery making. You begin a new stage of awkward dating.

This is where I would locate legal education since its divorce from the legal profession. Professor Feldman locates it in a similar place, if I correctly understand his recent article in this journal.¹ Where we differ is in our advice to the lovelorn legal academy. Feldman urges liaisons with other academic disciplines.² I urge that we attend to the children of the divorce: our law students. This is partly for their own sake; partly for the sake of society that they will serve; and partly for the sake of the legal academy itself.

It is hard to resist the attraction of interdisciplinary relationships. University presidents push them as a way for the legal academy to plug into funding sources that are not available for purely legal research and teaching. Individual academic units have their own reasons to connect with law schools. The connections may give entry into legislative chambers and courtrooms, with attendant prospects for exerting influence and earning notoriety and expert fees. In addition, law-and-something-else disciplinarity opens up law faculty positions to PhDs from other fields. Interdisciplinarity creates new publication opportunities—largely by breeding new *Journals of Law & Fill-in-the-Blank-with-Some-Other-Field*. Along with those opportunities come new symposia on exciting topics and new conferences in exotic places.

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I thank my friend and former colleague Professor Howard B. Stravitz for supplying the title of this letter and his wisdom on its subject matter.

1. Stephen M. Feldman, *The Transformation of an Academic Discipline: Law Professors in the Past and Future (or Toy Story Too)*, 54 *J. Legal Educ.* 471 (2004).
2. *Id.* at 473 (arguing that law professors "might stake out a new expertise, as interdisciplinarians").

The problem with promiscuous interdisciplinarity is that it does little to improve our graduates' ability to practice law or to improve the quality of justice. Furthermore, it distracts us from pursuits that would bring such improvement. I am speaking, specifically, of curricular and instructional development and legal reform. More specifically still, I mean efforts such as improving law school graduates' ability to write and increasing the availability of basic, competently rendered legal services such as the preparation of living wills. There seems to be a strong consensus that law schools do *not* adequately prepare their graduates to practice law and that basic, competently rendered legal services are not widely available to the poor and the working class. Under those conditions, it is selfish and irresponsible for the legal academy to pursue interdisciplinarity on a broad scale so that law professors can feel good about themselves despite their abandonment by the legal profession.

Beyond that, there is not much of a future in rebound relationships between the legal academy and other academic disciplines. Its future cannot be as bright as that of a strong relationship between the legal academy and its students. Ultimately, legal education will be judged by—and rewarded or esteemed (or not) because of—its graduates and the legal system that they create. Our focus should be on law and law, not law and something else.