

Learning law through experience and the development of competencies: the case of the law school at Uniandes

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Abstract

This article examines the curricular transformation of the undergraduate programme at the Uniandes School of Law, highlighting the creation and implementation of the Eje Transversal de Aprendizaje Jurídico Experiencial (AJET). This innovative educational proposal is framed within a new competency-based curriculum that emphasises experiential learning, drawing on the theories of David Kolb, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and others. Through three key types of courses or stages —projects, litigation, and clinics— AJET integrates active methodologies such as problem oriented project-based learning (PO-PLB), simulations, and law clinic training. This approach not only responds to the demands of an ever-changing legal environment but also promotes ethical and socially responsible training. The article discusses the importance of competency-based education, highlighting its advantages over content-centred education, and the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of AJET. The conclusion emphasises how this educational transformation prepares future lawyers to effectively and ethically face contemporary challenges, setting a new standard in legal education.

Keywords: legal education; experiential learning; competency-based education.

This paper reflects a collaborative journey, offering an account of a shared experience. It narrates the process led by a professor, now Dean, who guided a reflective dialogue on curriculum implementation for the Law programme, alongside a student (now a graduate) serving as her assistant. Together, they engaged in a collaborative reflection, creating documents to foster collective deliberation. Their mentor-student dialogue allowed for an in-depth

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examination of the Faculty Development Plan 2021-2025 (Our School | Our Project), with an emphasis on curriculum transformation. We extend our gratitude to our School and its members for supporting us in sharing both the process and its outcomes.

The context and origin of the new curriculum at the law school at Universidad de los Andes

Since its founding in 1968, the School of Law at Universidad de los Andes, has sought to implement a different approach to teaching and learning law, promoting active teaching and moving away from traditional, passive methods.¹ In 1997, the School underwent its first major curricular reform, inspired by problem-based learning (PBL), an innovative methodology that several faculty members adopted after visiting Maastricht University.² This transformation marked a significant shift in the educational approach, prioritising active problem-solving and encouraging dynamic student participation in their learning process.

The 1997 reform was designed to teach law in a contextualised and integrative manner, focusing on training professionals with strong argumentative, analytical, and problem-solving skills. The curriculum was organised into three cycles: contextualisation, basic training, and specialisation. The total number of credits was reduced from 212 to 172, and there was greater flexibility for students to choose their area of specialisation in the final semesters, with options in Private Law, Public Law, or Legal Theory.

Key changes included the introduction of a series of Legal Argumentation courses to develop students' argumentative abilities, replacing traditional subjects and adding new ones, including *Retos del Derecho* (The Challenges of Law). The structure of courses was simplified, for example, by consolidating multiple subjects into a single course, which sparked controversy due to the elimination of certain private law subjects and concerns about the problem-based learning (PBL) methodology.

¹ Mauricio Laguna Cardozo, "Transformando el Derecho: diálogo con Eleonora Lozano" Universidad de los Andes, April 17, 2024, <https://uniandes.edu.co/es/noticias/derecho/transformando-el-derecho-dialogo-con-eleonora-lozano>.

² Juny Montoya Vargas, "El caso del PBL en la Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad de Los Andes. Estudio de caso" (Universidad de Los Andes, 2006).

Since then, the Law School has made several adjustments to the curriculum, including the reintroduction of the *Teoría del Estado* (Theory of State) course and the renaming and reorientation of certain subjects, such as replacing *Retos del Derecho* with *Sociología Jurídica* (Legal Sociology).³

However, it wasn't until 2021 that a critical, thorough, and proactive reflection on what a relevant curriculum for legal education should entail was undertaken.⁴ With the arrival of Eleonora Lozano —the author— as Dean, we initiated a process of rethinking and collectively building a new curriculum through a self-reflection exercise, focused on the changes, trends, and needs of contemporary legal education and legal practice.

To support this process, we organised numerous meetings with the faculty's full time professors, along with focus groups that included students, former deans, alumni, practitioners, adjunct professors, and representatives from both the private and governmental sectors. These discussions enabled us to envision and design a future-oriented law curriculum that effectively responds to the demands of a constantly changing world and the evolving nature of legal issues.

Globally, there is a growing trend towards transitioning from content-based curricula to competency-based ones. This transition is especially crucial in the context of legal education, as traditional, static methods are no longer sufficient to meet contemporary challenges. The rapid and complex changes in the legal environment demand that legal professionals not only have a solid foundation of knowledge but also practical skills and specific competencies that allow them to adapt and excel in various contexts.⁵ As educators, advancements in international corporate transactions, law and technology, new business models, and interdisciplinary dialogues of social issues and global legal reforms highlight the need to focus on competency development in our students. Laws evolve, legal problems become more complex, and quality legal education

³ Ana María Otero Cleves and Andrés Jiménez Ángel, *Cuarenta años innovando el derecho: una mirada a la Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad de Los Andes, (1968-2008)* (Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 2011).

⁴ Mauricio Laguna Cardozo, "Transformando el Derecho: diálogo con Eleonora Lozano" <https://www.uniandes.edu.co/es/noticias/derecho/transformando-el-derecho-dialogo-con-eleonora-lozano>.

⁵ Susan L. Brooks, Marjorie A. Silver, Sarah Fishel, and Kellie Wiltsie, "Moving Toward a Competency-Based Model for Fostering Law Students' Relational Skills," *Clinical Law Review* 28, no. 2 (2022): 369-410.

must reflect this reality. In this context, competency-based training offers a pathway for preparing lawyers equipped to tackle future legal challenges.

The first task was to understand what a competency truly is and its components. Surprisingly, many of us, despite years of teaching, imparting content, and developing skills in our classes, seldom pause to question these pedagogical definitions. We reviewed literature and regulations that define the concept of competency and concluded that it consists of knowledge ("knowing"), skills ("knowing how to do"), and attitudes ("being") that enable lifelong learning.⁶

From this reflection process, the new curriculum for the Uniandes Law School emerged, based on six key competencies, each with different levels of development throughout the undergraduate programme:⁷

- a) *Legal reasoning, argumentation, and communication.* The ability to solve legal problems by adopting a position on what the law is and integrating it with legal concepts, institutions, principles, and rules. Proposed solutions reflect societal values. With proficiency in various forms of legal communication and argumentation techniques, students can effectively present oral and written arguments, tailored to the audience and role. These arguments avoid strategies with negative ethical implications, aiming instead to foster meaningful agreements.
- b) *Legal research.* Students develop research questions, design projects, and execute them according to the chosen methodology or method. Throughout this process, they are able to identify, prevent, and resolve ethical dilemmas. Research is valued as a tool for understanding, critiquing, and intervening in social issues.
- c) *Conflict management.* The skills to build conflict prevention and management strategies based on knowledge of the theory surrounding these issues, their functioning as a social phenomenon, and the specific characteristics of the conflict being addressed. Conflict prevention and management are grounded in active listening to the parties involved, respect, empathy, creativity, and collaboration.
- d) *Ethical and civic competencies.* Students resolve ethical dilemmas through reflection on their role as lawyers, students, and citizens,

⁶ Philippe Perrenoud, *Construir competencias desde la escuela* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Dolmen, 2004).

⁷ VidesDerecho, "#4," YouTube video, 19:34, published by Uniandes Derecho, 17 de julio de 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgJ8iCtekZ8&t=54s>.

considering the duties this entails and theories of justice and moral philosophy. Resolving ethical dilemmas requires recognising and collaborating with others.

- e) *Global and intercultural vision.* Students develop solutions to societal problems based on global, local, and regional legal debates. This includes the ability to integrate into the contexts where these issues arise, and to understand and communicate with other cultures, in a dialogue that leads to recognising diversity and promoting equality in legal strategies.
- f) *Interdisciplinarity.* Students approach the conceptual and methodological frameworks of law from different perspectives, to contribute insights from the knowledge and methodologies of other disciplines. They feel confident in engaging with new knowledge and in dialoguing with professionals from other fields.

Besides strengthening PBL⁸ as a key methodology, and complementing it with PO-PBL (Problem-Oriented Project-Based Learning), the central proposal of this new curriculum is to implement an experiential education approach.⁹ This approach is greatly inspired by the experiential learning theories developed primarily by David Kolb, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget. Kolb, one of the leading theorists in this field, argues that learning is a process in which knowledge is created by transforming experience. His ideas have been fundamental in redesigning our curriculum, as they promote a form of learning that is dynamic, participatory, and deeply connected with the real practice of law.

According to Kolb,¹⁰ learning is organised in a continuous cycle of four phases that turn experience into knowledge. These phases are:

- a) *Concrete experience.* In this phase, students directly engage in a new experience or reinterpret a previous one. It is a moment of action in which they face real situations that require their active participation. In the context of legal education, this can include activities such as trial

⁸ Howard S. Barrows, "Problem-Based Learning in Medicine and Beyond: A Brief Overview" *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 1996, no. 68 (1996): 3-12.

⁹ Colin Beard and John P. Wilson, *Experiential Learning: A Best Practice Handbook for Educators and Trainers*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2013).

¹⁰ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984).

simulations, legal aid clinics, trans and interdisciplinary projects or participation in debates and negotiations.

- b) *Reflective observation*. Following the concrete experience, students are required to reflect on what they have learned from it. This is a moment of observation and analysis where they consider the different aspects of the experience, evaluating their actions and those of others, as well as the results obtained. At this point, students are asked to discuss and share their observations with peers and professors to enrich their perspective.
- c) *Abstract conceptualisation*. Based on this reflection, students begin to form concepts and theories that explain what they have observed. This process of conceptualisation involves relating the experience and reflection to legal principles and theories, in order to build a theoretical framework that supports students' understanding. In this phase, critical analysis and abstraction skills are fostered, as these are crucial for the practice of law.
- d) *Active experimentation*. Finally, students apply their newly acquired theories and concepts in new situations. This phase involves putting into practice what they have learned, and testing and adjusting their hypotheses in different contexts. Active experimentation closes the learning cycle, as the new experiences generate feed back into the reflective and conceptual process. In the legal field, this can manifest through practice in legal clinics, supervised professional internships, or participation in social impact projects.

These four phases of Kolb's cycle are fundamental to the design of the new curriculum, as they promote learning that is based on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, as well as the constant integration of practice and theory through reflection and application.¹¹ This approach ensures that future lawyers both understand laws and legal principles, and develop practical and reflective skills that enable them to competently and ethically address and resolve real problems.

Transversally, the moments of the cycle and its stages of reflection allow for the development of attitudes (or "being," in the language of competencies) by raising awareness of the problems, tensions, and difficulties in the social and normative environment; reflecting on possible alternatives for solutions and

¹¹ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*.

their impact, recognising others, strengthening the curiosity to learn more in order to solve issues, and so on. This approach not only enhances problem-based learning but also integrates practical experiences as a core component of the educational process, ensuring that our students are better prepared to face the challenges of a constantly evolving legal landscape. It emphasises the need for lawyers who are skilled and knowledgeable, as well as ethical and socially responsible.¹²

The primary purpose of this text is to present and reflect on the design and general aspects of the moments and courses that comprise AJET. It is also intended to explore the challenges of its implementation and its importance for innovation in legal education.

What exactly is the AJET Axis?

The development of the new curriculum at the Universidad de los Andes Law School led to the creation of an integrated course axis known as AJET (Transversal Axis of Experiential Legal Learning). AJET is designed to provide an education that incorporates active teaching methodologies with an experiential approach, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical, real-world contexts throughout their undergraduate studies.

AJET is structured around a series of nine courses, strategically distributed over the nine semesters of the curriculum. This distribution integrates horizontal and vertically into the students' training, ensuring a coherent and cumulative progression in their experiential learning. To achieve this, the curriculum is divided into three key phases.¹³

¹² "Pregrado en Derecho tiene nuevo pensum basado en el aprendizaje jurídico experiencial," Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de los Andes. April 8, 2024, <https://derecho.uniandes.edu.co/pregrado-en-derecho-tiene-nuevo-pensum-basado-en-el-aprendizaje-juridico-experiencial/>.

¹³ Universidad de los Andes Law School, "Academic Curriculum Bachelor of Laws", Genially. <https://view.genially.com/662b261d8a98e00014171ca2>.



Figure 1: The interactive curriculum, shown in the image above, can be freely accessed on the Faculty of Law's website: <https://view.genially.com/655ebb70a950200011122f99>

AJET phase one: Projects

During the first semesters, the pedagogical focus is on students achieving the foundational level of the competencies outlined in the curriculum.¹⁴ In terms of AJET, this initial phase centres on the development of a core competency: Legal Research. This phase is crucial for fostering analytical and critical thinking skills, which are essential to their professional training.

The first phase consists of three courses: *Proyectos 1*, *Proyectos 2*, and *Proyectos 3*. These courses are progressively structured, enabling students to research around a macro-topic, starting from its foundational aspects and culminating in the creation of a litigation strategy, a bill proposal, or, more broadly, an impact-driven project.

*Proyectos 1*¹⁵

The *Proyectos 1* course introduces students to the development of legal research skills, which are essential for both professional and academic practice

¹⁴ Legal reasoning, argumentation and communication; legal research; conflict management; ethical and civic competencies; global and intercultural vision; interdisciplinarity.

¹⁵ Eleonora Lozano, Isabel Cristina Jaramillo, Betsy Perafán, Natalia Ramírez, and Renata Amaya, *Proyectos 1*, course syllabus, 2024, available in the Uniandes Law School internal database.

in law. Throughout the course, students will learn to initiate the research process, from defining the problem and formulating the research question to searching for and analysing relevant sources.

This will enable them to develop basic legal reasoning, gain a clear understanding of the research problem, and become familiar with the concepts, types, phases, and methods of legal research. The course is designed to strengthen students' argumentation and communication skills, as well as provide an interdisciplinary perspective on law. This course highlights the significance of interdisciplinary approaches by exploring how research in social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology enriches legal inquiry with valuable insights. For instance, it examines how quantitative methodologies from economics offer robust frameworks for addressing social challenges, equipping legal analysis with enhanced tools and perspectives. Key skills to be developed include identifying and formulating a relevant legal problem, selecting and analysing appropriate legal sources, synthesising and comparing research findings, and effectively communicating the results both in writing and orally.

The course also emphasises important attitudes such as curiosity, rigour, and commitment to legal research, as well as respect, collaboration, and constructive criticism among peers. It encourages students to understand the interaction of law with other disciplines, recognising its possibilities and limitations.

*Proyectos 2*¹⁶

In *Proyectos 2*, students advance their legal research process, learning appropriate methodologies and techniques to address a relevant research question in the field of law. They become familiar with theories on the role of law in social reality. Students reformulate the research question from the previous course, select data collection techniques, analyse the obtained information, and prepare a research report that incorporates their findings. This report synthesises the research process and results, adhering to standards of rigor, coherence, and clarity.

¹⁶ Eleonora Lozano, Isabel Cristina Jaramillo, Betsy Perafán, Natalia Ramírez, and Renata Amaya, *Proyectos 2*, course syllabus, 2024, available in the Uniandes Law School internal database.

The course primarily focuses on developing legal research skills, while also addressing interdisciplinarity, ethics, and citizenship. It equips students to identify, pose, and solve relevant legal research problems, evaluate information sources, analyse and organize data, and effectively communicate research results both in writing and orally. Students learn to manage, plan, and evaluate their research projects and understand law in context with its relationship to social reality.

The course encourages a commitment to academic excellence, ethical handling of information, respect for diverse opinions, curiosity for knowledge, collaboration, teamwork, and a deeper understanding of the social functions of law.

*Proyectos 3*¹⁷

Project 3 is designed to enable students to develop a proposal aimed at impacting or improving the problematic situation addressed in the previous courses, *Proyectos 1* and *Proyectos 2*.

This proposal could involve the creation of a normative instrument that implements a public policy (such as a law or decree), designing a national or international litigation strategy (e.g., through a lawsuit), or making an intervention before a court (e.g., an *amicus curiae*), among other possibilities.

Each proposal must be thoroughly justified. For instance, a legislative project would require a corresponding explanatory statement, or a decree would need a justificatory memorandum, all in accordance with legal requirements.

By the end of the course, students will present their impact or improvement proposals at a project fair (using posters, infographics, or other formats), where they will receive feedback from professors, peers, and invited experts. This process marks the culmination of a comprehensive learning journey spanning three courses. For example, if their macro-theme focuses on environmental justice, in *Proyectos 1*, they will have conducted an in-depth literature review and developed a state-of-the-art analysis of the topic. In *Proyectos 2*, they will have designed a research study and collected data on a specific issue. Finally,

¹⁷ Eleonora Lozano, Isabel Cristina Jaramillo, Betsy Perafán, Natalia Ramírez, and Renata Amaya, *Proyectos 3*, course syllabus, 2024, available in the Uniandes Law School internal database.

leveraging the insights gained from these stages, they will craft a legally impactful project in *Proyectos* 3. This progression not only equips students with essential research and analytical skills but also empowers them to propose actionable solutions to real-world legal challenges.

Students primarily develop their research competence, enabling them to solve legal problems with rigor, critical thinking, and creativity. This process also enhances their project planning and management skills. The course emphasises the importance of well-founded legal reasoning, supported by strong argumentation, and effective communication when presenting their proposals during the preparatory activities and at the project fair itself.

Finally, students cultivate attitudes of commitment, responsibility, and ethics, which will drive them to act with integrity, respect, and solidarity in their professional practice.

These first three courses of the experiential axis are designed to introduce students to project-oriented problem-based learning. The active and collaborative methodology is central to these courses, where teamwork is key to fostering the development of critical and practical skills.

Each course promotes working in small groups to ensure personalised attention and effective interaction. With sections limited to no more than 20 students,¹⁸ a more interactive dynamic and direct support from the professors are fostered. This approach ensures that students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also develop practical and collaborative skills essential for their professional future.

In sum, the *Proyectos* 1, 2, and 3 courses constitute a fundamental component of AJET, providing students with a solid foundation in legal research and preparing them to face legal challenges with a practical and experiential approach.

¹⁸ For context, each cohort in our program consists of 150 students admitted per semester. These students are divided into sections of 20 for the courses within the AJET axis. Unlike other universities where only a few mandatory courses are shared among all students, our Faculty offers a unified programme that all 150 students follow together.

AJET phase two: Litigation

The second stage of AJET primarily focuses on developing the competency of "conflict management." This is achieved through courses centred on procedural law. This stage is crucial, as it takes place at the midpoint of the curriculum, where students are introduced to conflict, its procedural dimensions, and learn how to effectively manage these scenarios.

This phase of the curriculum is essential for consolidating the theoretical and practical foundation of substantive and procedural law. It includes two key courses: *Litigio 1* and *Litigio 2*, in which students engage in active methodologies such as simulations and moot courts to learn the specificities of procedural law in Colombia.

The central objective of these courses is for students to acquire knowledge of procedural law, to be able to apply it in practical contexts (know-how), and recognize their role as lawyers in conflict management (being).

*Litigios 1*¹⁹

This is a theoretical-practical course designed for law students who wish to understand the most relevant processes in procedural, civil, and criminal law within judicial proceedings. The course is designed to help students recognize, study, and apply the specific phases of these processes, considering law in action, justice, the interests of future clients, and the crucial role of judges. By the end of the course, students will be able to identify the appropriate judicial process for each case, advise clients, develop evidence strategies, conduct procedural stages through role-playing exercises, and receive feedback from legal professionals.

The course covers essential topics such as the principles of process and procedure, the object and structure of the process, jurisdiction and competence, filing and responding to a lawsuit, the parties involved in the process, differential litigation strategies, deadlines, notifications, appeals, and the use of technology in decision-making.

¹⁹ María del Socorro Rueda, Ana María Cortes, Fernando Arrázola and Ricardo Molina, *Litigios 1*, course syllabus, 2024, available in the Uniandes Law School internal database.

The course also fosters essential skills and attitudes including reading comprehension, oral and written expression, research, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, responsibility, honesty, and respect. *Litigio 1* provides students with a comprehensive academic and professional education in procedural, civil, and criminal law, equipping them to face the challenges and opportunities of the current legal landscape.

*Litigios 2*²⁰

This course is theoretical-practical and designed for law students who want to understand the most relevant aspects of evidence in procedural, civil, administrative, labour, or criminal law within judicial proceedings. The law of evidence is a branch of procedural law that examines the means, rules, and principles that establish the facts relevant to resolving a legal conflict. Proper knowledge and application of the law of evidence are crucial for any lawyer's professional practice, as they directly impact the effectiveness of their argumentation and the defence of their client's interests.

On this course, students will learn the basic concepts of the law of evidence and the criteria for selecting, presenting, evaluating, and challenging evidence in various judicial processes. They will also develop the necessary skills and attitudes to handle evidence with rigour, ethics, and respect for the fundamental rights of the parties involved.

The course includes theoretical-practical classes designed to encourage active participation, collaborative work, and meaningful learning. Students are expected to resolve the assigned case during the sessions.

A distinctive feature of the *Litigio 1* and *Litigio 2* courses is the use of active teaching methodologies. Students participate in simulations and moot courts, where they represent real procedural cases and situations in a controlled environment. These simulations enable students to experience firsthand the dynamics of the judicial process, from presenting evidence to arguing in court, developing essential practical and procedural skills.

As part of a commitment to the future transformation of legal education, the Law School is working on creating immersive virtual reality environments.

²⁰ María del Socorro Rueda, Ana María Cortes, Fernando Arrázola and Ricardo Molina, *Litigios 2*, course syllabus, 2024, available in the Uniandes Law School internal database.

These environments enable students to learn about procedural law using advanced technologies, providing a more interactive and realistic learning experience. Virtual reality environments simulate complex judicial scenarios in which students can practice and hone their skills in a safe setting before facing real cases.²¹

As in AJET phase one, collaborative learning is fundamental in the Litigation courses. Students work in groups to conduct simulations and develop procedural strategies, fostering teamwork and collaboration. To ensure personalised attention and effective interaction, each course section is limited to 20 students, meaning that students can receive more direct support from professors and maximize their practical learning.

In sum, through the *Litigio 1* and *Litigio 2* courses, AJET phase two provides students with practical and in-depth training in procedural law. Using active methodologies and advanced technologies, these courses prepare future lawyers to competently and ethically tackle procedural challenges, ensuring comprehensive and modern education at the Universidad de los Andes Law School.

AJET phase three: Clinics

In the final semesters, AJET emphasises clinical work and the socially responsible practice of law. Students engage in legal aid clinics where they apply their knowledge to real cases, interacting with clients and communities, and addressing concrete legal issues. This last phase of the curriculum both reinforces their practical skills and instils in them a sense of social responsibility and professional ethics. In this phase, the courses focus not only on conflict management as a core competency but also on the development of ethical and civic competencies.

This final AJET phase corresponds to the last four semesters of the curriculum. By this stage students will have acquired a solid foundation and will be ready to begin their law clinic training, where they will work in the University's legal

²¹ Amalia Verdu Sanmartin and Johanna Niemi, "Virtual reality in legal education. Challenges and possibilities to transform normative knowledge," In *The European Digital Economy: Drivers of Digital Transition and Economic Recovery*, ed. Amalia Verdu Sanmartin and Johanna Niemi (2024).

aid clinic, handling cases for vulnerable populations and representing them as student lawyers.

Student will also design strategic litigation strategies, in courses *Clínicas 1, 2, 3, and 4*.²²

Clínicas 1

Clínicas 1 provides students with the opportunity to engage in their first experience in managing legal cases with judicial and/or administrative practice. The objective is to protect and defend the rights of individuals who need legal services in areas such as property, family, criminal, labour, public administration, or women's rights. Students can focus on two of these areas, one primary and one complementary. The course centres on the comprehensive, theoretical, and practical preparation of cases through directed simulations, focusing on all phases of ongoing judicial processes. It also includes restorative justice activities and tutela actions.²³ This clinical work is intended to strengthen students' autonomous learning and collaborative work, and to prepare them for activities requiring a progressive and complementary understanding of legal cases.

Clínicas 2

Clínicas 2 allows students to continue working in their primary area of interest or explore new ones. Litigation projects offer a portfolio of advanced and new topics that go beyond judicial procedures, concentrating on the comprehensive, theoretical, and practical preparation for litigation. This includes restorative justice activities and tutela actions. This course is designed for students to deepen their understanding of judicial and administrative practices through a progressive experiential learning model, providing greater autonomy and collaboration compared to *Clínicas 1*, while ensuring coherence in managing legal cases.

²² Universidad de los Andes Law School, "Academic Curriculum Bachelor of Laws".

²³ Tutela actions in Colombia are legal mechanisms designed to provide immediate protection of fundamental rights when these are violated or threatened, either by public authorities or, in specific cases, by private individuals. They are swift, free, and subsidiary processes, providing prompt resolutions to safeguard these rights effectively.

Clinicas 3

In *Clinicas 3*, students engage in socio-legal research projects and interdisciplinary legal practices through experiential learning. They collaborate with users and allies to address and propose solutions to issues of social justice and public interest. Users and allies are primarily collectives or individuals who face exclusion, discrimination, or vulnerability, as well as organisations (state and non-state) that advocate for the protection of their rights and interests. This course emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinarity, recognizing that addressing complex legal issues often requires the integration of knowledge from other fields. For example, certain clinics rely on disciplines such as psychology or accounting to provide better frameworks for strategic litigation projects. This interdisciplinary approach is fundamental in clinics like PAIIS (see below), which focuses on projects involving populations with disabilities.

Engaging in initiatives of this nature without considering psychological perspectives or, in many cases, understanding the medical aspects of disability and diverse abilities would lead to incomplete or inadequate solutions. Details about the specific clinics currently available at the Faculty are provided later in this text, offering a comprehensive overview of their contributions. This course strengthens students' ability to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge in solving complex and real-world legal problems.

Clinicas 4

Clinicas 4 builds upon the foundation of *Clinicas 3*, where students continue to develop socio-legal research projects and interdisciplinary legal practices. They maintain contact with users and allies, addressing and proposing solutions to issues of social justice and public interest. This course marks the culmination of the students' law clinic experience, allowing them to apply the competencies acquired throughout AJET in a comprehensive and professional manner. Interaction with vulnerable groups and collaboration with rights-defending organisations consolidate their ethical and socially responsible training.

The legal clinic courses use active methodologies to maximize experiential learning. Students participate in real cases, applying their knowledge in practical contexts and facing complex legal situations. Practice in the University's legal aid clinic provides students with the opportunity to interact

with the community, offering legal services to those most in need and developing a deep understanding of the social responsibility of law.²⁴

Collaborative learning is a cornerstone of the legal clinic courses. Students work in teams to manage cases, develop litigation strategies, and conduct socio-legal research. A distinctive feature of the legal clinic courses is the one-on-one interaction with clients. As part of analysing and handling real cases, students hold public service hours where individuals, often from vulnerable populations, come to the legal aid clinic for personalised assistance with their cases. Here, students handle consultations firsthand, which is crucial for developing soft skills and recognising the social impact of these courses.

While legal aid clinics are a key component of experiential learning and an integral part of the curriculum design, our faculty has prior experience with such clinics. Currently, our faculty operates the following five Clinics, as part of the university services:

Prison Group: This group advocates for the respect and protection of the rights of incarcerated and post-incarcerated populations through legal counselling, high-impact litigation, formal and informal education programmes, and legislative and public policy advising, among other activities.

Migrants: The legal clinic for migrants constitutes one of the pillars of the Centre for Migration Studies (CEM). The clinic also collaborates with the Legal and Migration Research Group in Colombia.

Environmental and Public Health Legal Clinic (MASP): Established in late 2015, this clinic promotes access to environmental and climate justice to ensure effective protection of collective rights to a healthy environment and public health.

Action for Equality and Social Inclusion Programme (PAIIS): Founded in 2007 as one of the Uniandes Law School's public interest law clinics, PAIIS has since focused on implementing the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Colombian law and in the everyday lives of society at large. Over time, PAIIS has expanded its

²⁴ James Marson, Adam Wilson, and Mark Van Hoorebeek, "The necessity of clinical legal education in university law schools: a UK Perspective," *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 7 (2005): 29-43.

work to include the rights of people with other forms of diversity, particularly related to gender, sexual orientation, and older adults.

Business and Entrepreneurship Legal Clinic: This project was initiated by the Uniandes Legal Aid Clinic in collaboration with the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce. It focuses on reducing barriers for entrepreneurs, primarily for startups, micro and small businesses, and organisations within the solidarity economy.

To bring the AJET vision to life across its nine courses (43 credits in total, over 159, 27%),²⁵ a training process was initiated for the School's full-time and adjunct faculty. These professors were trained in active teaching methodologies and the principles of experiential learning to effectively support the development and implementation of the new curriculum. This collective effort has made AJET a tangible reality, offering innovative and relevant legal education that prepares students to face the challenges of the contemporary legal world.

Another important aspect of making AJET "tangible" is recognising that it is not limited to the nine courses that comprise it, but also involves a vertical integration with the other courses in the curriculum. In other words, we understand that AJET consists of nine key courses, one per semester. However, one of its pedagogical approaches is for each semester-long course to effectively integrate the knowledge from the other courses that students should be taking each semester.

Thus AJET is an integrative space that allows students to make connections between what they have learned in other courses, thereby strengthening integrative learning.

In sum, the third AJET phase, through the *Clínica 1, 2, 3, and 4* courses, provides students with comprehensive training in legal practice. This integral and progressive approach ensures that future lawyers are prepared to face professional challenges with competence, ethics, and social responsibility,

²⁵ Although the curriculum design initially envisions nearly 30% of the courses with an experiential focus, in fact, the other courses in the curriculum can also incorporate this approach.

consolidating their preparation for a legal career that promotes justice and equity.

Why is AJET important?

Training lawyers to address the legal challenges of the future cannot be achieved through an education focused solely on content. The contemporary legal environment is dynamic and ever-changing, requiring legal professionals to not only possess theoretical knowledge but also develop practical skills and specific competencies that enable them to adapt and respond effectively to these shifts. In this context, AJET at Universidad de los Andes plays a crucial role.

The competency-based education approach shifts away from the simple accumulation of knowledge. Instead, it focuses on the development of competencies, understood through three dimensions: knowledge, skills or know-how, and being or attitudes. This approach is particularly relevant in the field of law, where lawyers must be able to apply their knowledge in practical situations, solve complex problems, and act ethically and responsibly. This preparation equips graduates to apply their competencies across various professional settings—whether as in-house counsel for large corporations, litigators, consultants in law firms, judges, or academics.

For example, experiential courses like *Litigio* not only simulate courtroom scenarios but also cultivate essential skills and competencies such as oral expression, argumentation, and conflict management. These skills are vital not only for litigation but also for navigating complex professional challenges beyond the courtroom. By focusing on these competencies, graduates are prepared to integrate knowledge, skills, and ethical attitudes seamlessly into their daily professional activities, regardless of their specific legal role. This emphasis on transversal competencies underscores the broader impact and adaptability of competency-based legal education.

The advantages of competency-based education over content-based education are numerous.²⁶

- a) *Practical relevance*: Students learn to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, better preparing them for the real-world challenges of the profession.
- b) *Skill development*: Emphasis is placed on developing critical skills such as analytical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, and teamwork.
- c) *Adaptability*: Students are prepared to adapt to changes and new situations in the legal environment, a crucial competency in an ever-changing world.
- d) *Ethics and responsibility*: Training focuses on professional ethics and social responsibility, essential aspects for the practice of law.
- e) *Personalised learning*: A more personalised and student-centred learning approach is promoted, allowing for greater flexibility and adaptability in the educational process.

Law schools must reflect on the key competencies that should structure their curricula. Practical skills, critical thinking, adaptability, effective communication, and ethical responsibility are fundamental. Implementing educational methodologies that promote these competencies will ensure that future lawyers are better prepared to serve society and meet the challenges of the contemporary legal world. Moreover, adopting a competency-based curriculum through an experiential approach better integrates this concept of learning.

²⁶ Please see the following sources: Education Commission of the States, "CBE Toolkit," 2017, 2024, <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/CBE-Toolkit-2017.pdf>; University of Texas at Arlington, "The Pros and Cons of Competency-Based Learning," UTA Online, accessed July 22, 2024; T.R. Nodine, "How Did We Get Here? A Brief History of Competency-Based Higher Education in the United States," *Journal of Competency-Based Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 5-11, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbe2.1004>; C. R. García Ruiz, A. Fillol Mazo, and D. Carrizo Aguado, *La formación en derecho basada en competencias: especial referencia al método de casos*, 1a ed. (Madrid: Dykinson S.L., 2022); J. B. Climent Bonilla, "Reflexiones sobre la educación basada en competencias," *Revista Complutense de Educación* 21, no. 1 (2010): 91- 106.

Challenges in AJET implementation

The full implementation AJET, expected to culminate in 2028 with the introduction of the *Clinica 4* course, presents several significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure its success:

Participation of the entire teaching staff in curriculum implementation. All faculty members were involved at various stages of the curriculum reflection process. The major challenge now is for them to actively engage in its implementation, recognising the importance of change and innovation through competency-based and experiential learning. They must be open to measuring the proposed learning outcomes and making the necessary adjustments based on a process of trial and error.

Training and professional development for professors: Professors must be trained in active teaching methodologies and the experiential education approach. Educators must be equipped to guide students in a competency-based learning environment.

Adoption of the competency-based educational model: Students need to understand and embrace the new educational model. This requires clear and effective communication about the benefits and importance of the competency-based approach.

Continuous reflection on new methodologies: Continuous reflect and adaptation of the teaching methodologies used is required to ensure they meet both the students' needs and the demands of the evolving legal landscape.

Use of new technologies in education: Integrating advanced technologies, such as immersive virtual reality environments and artificial intelligence, poses both technical and pedagogical challenges, as they must be used effectively to enrich the learning experience. For the use of new technologies to be beneficial, professors must be trained in making the best use of these tools in the classroom and in the students' learning process.

Continuous evaluation and improvement: Implementing mechanisms for continuous evaluation and feedback to improve the courses and the axis as a whole. This includes assessing the impact of experiential learning on students and adjusting educational strategies as needed. We are currently in the preliminary stages of designing the SAC-FD (Quality Assurance System for

Law School). This system is designed to monitor students in their learning experiences and in the progressive development of their competencies at the beginning, midway, and at the end of their academic programme.

Although still in its early phases, the SAC-FD is designed to gather and triangulate data from multiple stakeholders in the educational process. One primary source of information will be student surveys conducted at the end of each semester to evaluate their courses. Complementing this, targeted surveys with professors and teaching assistants will provide additional insights, enabling a thorough triangulate of performance data for each course. This approach provides a comprehensive perspective on the effectiveness of the curriculum and methodologies.

The Quality Assurance System also includes plans to assess students' competencies at the beginning of their first semester and again at the end of their studies. Using a hypothetical case for analysis and resolution, this process will diagnose students' initial competency levels and compare them with the results of a similar evaluation conducted at the end of the programme.

In the long term, the SAC-FD is intended to incorporate feedback from employers and graduates of the new curriculum. This will enable us to develop indicators that provide deeper insights into the programme's effectiveness, fostering continuous improvement and ensuring the relevance and impact of our educational strategies.

Sustainability and scalability: AJET must be sustainable in the long term and can be scaled to accommodate a larger number of students without compromising educational quality.

Interdisciplinary collaboration: It is important to foster interdisciplinary collaboration within the university and with external actors, including social, governmental, and business organisations, to enrich learning and provide relevant practical experiences.

In conclusion, AJET represents a significant advancement in legal education, aligning with global trends towards competency-based training. This approach not only better equips future lawyers for the challenges of the contemporary legal world but also ensures their education is comprehensive, ethical, and socially responsible. As we move towards full AJET implementation, it is

crucial to address these challenges with a strategic vision and a commitment to educational excellence.

Conclusions

AJET represents a pioneering and transformative effort in legal education at the Universidad de los Andes Law School. By integrating experiential learning and a competency-based approach, this new curriculum responds to contemporary demands and the continuous evolution of the legal environment.

Educational transformation: The implementation of the AJET axis marks a significant shift in the way law is taught and learned. By focusing education on practical and relevant competencies, it prepares students to effectively and ethically face the challenges of the real legal world. This approach ensures that future lawyers master theoretical knowledge and are able to apply it in practical contexts, developing critical, analytical, and collaborative skills. Furthermore, it contributes to shaping better human beings and responsible, socially proactive citizens.

Active methodologies and experiential education: The use of active methodologies such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, simulations, and moot courts, provides students with dynamic and interactive learning experiences. These methodologies enhance their understanding and application of procedural law as well as foster innovation and adaptability in legal practice.

Ethical and responsible training: AJET emphasises the importance of social responsibility and professional ethics in the training of lawyers. Through the legal clinic courses, students directly engage in defending the rights of vulnerable populations and resolving issues of social justice. This experience not only strengthens their practical skills but also cultivates a deep commitment to justice and equity.

Challenges and opportunities: AJET implementation presents many challenges, including continuous training for professors, student adaptation to the new educational model, the integration of advanced technologies (and AI), and constant evaluation of the impact of experiential learning. However, these challenges also offer opportunities to innovate and improve legal education, ensuring it remains relevant and effective in an ever-changing global environment.

Sustainability and scalability: To ensure AJET's long-term sustainability, mechanisms for continuous evaluation and feedback need to be established, while fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships with external actors. These efforts will ensure that the educational model can be scaled to benefit a larger number of students without compromising educational quality.

AJET not only responds to the current needs of legal training but also sets a new standard for legal education in Colombia and beyond. By preparing students to address future challenges with practical skills, professional ethics, and a comprehensive approach, AJET ensures that graduates from the Universidad de los Andes Law School are well-equipped to positively contribute to society and the legal system.

In conclusion, AJET represents an educational innovation that combines the best of experiential learning theories and competency-based education. Its implementation and success will depend on a continuous commitment to educational excellence, pedagogical innovation, and social responsibility. As we move towards the full realisation of this new model, it is crucial to maintain a strategic vision and an adaptable approach to overcome challenges and maximize learning opportunities for our students.