Washington University launches online LL.M program
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Washington University in St. Louis School of Law is the latest to add an online LL.M. The program, set to start in January 2013, will allow foreign lawyers to complete a master's degree in U.S. law without leaving their home country.

Students will have the option of traveling to St. Louis for a summer immersion course and to attend graduation, but otherwise will be able to maintain their law practices. The school already offers a traditional LL.M. program in U.S. law for that requires classroom attendance.

"We aim to produce extraordinary graduates who benefit from the highest caliber online education available — and to ensure that the quality equals or exceeds the quality of the best LL.M. programs in the world," Dean Kent Syverud said.

Florida Coastal School of Law started a fully online LL.M. for foreign lawyers in 2010, and in recent years additional schools have introduced fully or partly online LL.M. programs geared toward U.S. attorneys focusing in specific areas of the law. The University of Alabama School of Law, Boston University School of Law, Loyola University Chicago School of Law, New York University School of Law, Southwestern Law School and Vermont Law School are among them.

The American Bar Association limits juris doctor programs to no more than 12 credit hours of coursework conducted via distance education, meaning online or real-time videoconference classes. The ABA's Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar is considering increasing that limit to 15 hours.

But no such restriction exists for LL.M. programs, which face little ABA oversight. Adding LL.M. programs has been a popular way for law schools to increase enrollment and revenue, particularly with programs geared towards foreign attorneys. Foreign attorneys who complete online LL.M. programs face restrictions on where they may sit for a bar exam, although many never aspire to practice in the United States.

Administrators at Washington University hope to enroll 20 students during the program’s inaugural year and eventually as many as 100. Classes will combine real-time instruction and self-paced coursework. A social technology platform will enable students to interact with classmates and professors 24 hours per day.

Tuition for the program will be $48,000 — the same cost as the school's in-residence LL.M. for foreign lawyers.