

By Michael Fleming

The University of Delaware's December 2010 announcement that it was exploring the launch of a new law school struck some as a bit of a head scratcher. Now, [President Pat Harker has recommended](#) the Board "terminate further active consideration of this initiative."

Not that there weren't sound merits to commend the idea of UD hosting a first-class law school. As President Harker said in December:

"By operating a first-class law school in a state known for its considerable influence in corporate law, the University of Delaware could occupy a special niche in the nationwide legal community, attract top-notch students and faculty from across the country and produce future law and business leaders for Delaware."

But from the beginning, the effort and its timing faced significant challenges. For starters, the market for new lawyers isn't exactly thriving and the law school plans received a somewhat chilly reception in the Delaware legal community. And fundraising for such a project in this economic climate is very heavy lifting indeed.

Wilmington lawyer Fred Cottrell, a partner with Richards, Layton and Finger and a UD grad himself (and season ticket holder), said he agreed with the decision not to pursue a law school in Newark. "The administration is doing the right thing, given many factors including the soft hiring market for new lawyers," said Cottrell. "From an economic development standpoint, I think the University's continued focus on science and technology is a smart path."

It's hard not to feel that UD missed a golden opportunity to open a law school 40-50 years ago or to have acquired and folded Widener into a UD operation some years back. (The enthusiasm for such efforts among the local bar at the time may not have been great then either, but for different reasons.)

To Cottrell's point, if it's a new graduate school UD wants, something that will fulfill the school's strategic plan to "invest in professional programs that provide excellence, uniqueness, impact and response to societal needs," then why not explore the creation of a medical institution? A new research-based med school would draw on UD's strong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) heritage and complement the growing local health-care and life-sciences economy.

The potential economic benefits of a new medical school are alluring. A [recent report](#) by the Associated Medical Schools of New York suggested that "One in every 11 jobs in New York State is supported by our medical colleges and teaching hospitals," and that NY

medical schools generated billions for the state in jobs created, research investment, medical tourism and taxes paid.

Another study by the Milken Institute concluded that a new medical school at the University of Central Florida could create 6,000 new jobs – as many as 25,000 jobs with an economic impact of as much as \$6.4 billion when considering potential tie-ins with the growth of a local life sciences industry.

In South Carolina, they are currently debating adding a *third* medical school.

Through the [Delaware Institute of Medical Information and Research \(DIMER\)](#), the state has a relationship with the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, a relationship that by all accounts appears to be going well. In fact, on Jefferson's [own website](#) they claim to be “the official medical school for the state of Delaware,” something that might surprise many Blue Hens. But that arrangement involves the state paying Jefferson to reserve spots for Delaware residents to attend a school in Philadelphia, the economic benefits of which are limited.

With world-class hospitals in Christiana and Al Du Pont – formal ties between these institutions and a medical school at UD could offer significant mutual benefits in addition to the prospects of thousands of new, good-paying jobs in technology and medicine. As with other top-tier medical programs, students and faculty would literally come from around the world.

When making the case for the law-school study in December, UD pointed to the fact that “Delaware is one of the few states in the country without a law school at its flagship state institution.” The same could be said of a medical school.

While the costs of building such a school would be enormous, if UD's ambitions are to be mentioned in the same breath as UNC and UVA, then, why not take a little of the same medicine?