



Q&A with Jennifer Barry on the ACC In-house Counsel Certification Program

Skills and Professional Development



Why did you decide to participate in the ACC In-house Counsel Certification program? What made it stand out?

Continuing professional development for lawyers generally focuses on substantive areas of law and/or private practice management. It was exciting to see a course tailored to “how to be a better in-house lawyer” and focusing on the issues that affect in-house counsel, issues that don’t necessarily arise in private practice. The prospect of obtaining a certification that I could include on my resume was also enticing.



Jennifer Barry, senior legal counsel and acting board secretary, Box Hill Institute

Can you share a key takeaway from the program? What were you able to take back and immediately apply in your legal department?

I found the areas regarding how to manage the internal legal function particularly interesting, and have a lot of plans to implement. Unfortunately, my 2020 workload prevented me from doing so, but I have a lot of plans for 2021!

A key message I took back immediately was the statement: "The in-house counsel is the conscience of the company." It really reinforces the importance of the role of the in-house counsel. It was something that I had had an understanding of before the course (although had never put into those words), but having the course emphasize that aspect of the in-house role, and the importance of the in-house counsel as an ethical leader within the company, truly highlighted the fundamental role that the in-house counsel plays within a company, in addition to being a legal advisor.

Was there one session from the program that really stood out?

The session regarding managing the legal department and developing legal department strategic planning was particularly useful. As sole in-house counsel, it can be extremely easy to end up focused on “business as usual” and the overall strategic plan for the company; and lose sight of the importance of strategic planning for the legal department itself. This is something I plan to rectify during 2021. By preparing a strategic plan for the legal department, I will be able to gain a better understanding as to how the legal department can support the overall strategic plan of Box Hill Institute, particularly in terms of long-term planning. Further, I hope to be able to identify areas where I can incorporate innovation to better support the business areas of the institute and streamline the stakeholder experience.

You were a member of the first cohort that completed the ACC In-house Certification program in the virtual format over multiple weeks. How did you find the virtual format and did it still provide opportunities to connect and engage with your fellow attendees?

The virtual format was well done, and I think everyone who took part would like to thank the presenters for their efforts in leading and facilitating the sessions from the United States early in their morning! The virtual sessions also enabled the program to be spread over a few weeks rather than a few days, which meant there was more time to take everything in over the course of the program. It was a bit disappointing not to be able to meet the fellow attendees in person but the group work over Zoom still gave time to interact and engage.

The certification program is intended to explore several core competency areas, including developing stakeholder relationships, law department management, and legal services. In your opinion, why are these skills — or core competencies — essential for in-house success?

These core competencies are the things that drive successful in-house practice. An internal legal department cannot be a partner to the business if it does not have relationships with stakeholders and the business does not have trust in the legal department. The internal legal department is a business partner and business enabler, not a roadblock, and it is essential to build stakeholder relationships and legal department reputation to emphasize this within the business.

Can you provide an example of how the program helped your understanding and delivery of one of these core competencies?

The program helped my understanding of legal team management. I have been the sole legal officer for most of my in-house career, so it was particularly helpful to have guidance on how to view management of the legal function more strategically. The program emphasised the importance of the legal department being viewed as indispensable within the business, and how stakeholder relationships and reporting lines can affect the view of the legal department. This provided both ideas and suggestions for improvements that can be implemented in the legal department at my current role, and also an understanding that I will utilize when applying for future roles.

Looking back at the course, how will the In-house Counsel Certified (ICC) designation help advance your in-house career?

My hope is that it will show employers, both current and future, that I am dedicated to in-house practice, and that I am focused on improving my skills in that area.

Would you recommend ACC's In-house Certification Program to your colleagues? What advice can you offer other corporate counsel who want to participate in the program, but may need to convince their GC or boss?

Yes, definitely. It is rare to find continuing professional development or intensive courses focused on in-house counsel specifically, rather than private practice. It was also wonderful to have the opportunity to focus on how the in-house counsel interacts with the business and how to improve the internal legal team and internal stakeholders' view of the legal team — information that will provide benefit in every in-house counsel role.

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