A History of the School of Law

In 1939, the North Carolina General Assembly established a law school at North Carolina College for Negroes to provide African Americans with an opportunity for a legal education. Although scheduled to open in 1939, the law school opening was postponed until the following year because of insufficient enrollment. Hence, the Law School formally opened in 1940 with five students in the first class.

Always committed to providing opportunity, the school has continued to grow and excel over the decades. In 1944, the school admitted its first women. In 1950, the school received its first accreditation from the American Bar Association. In 1965, Caucasian students were enrolled, and by 1972, Native Americans were enrolled. In 1981, the Law School established an evening program, the only evening law school program between Atlanta, Georgia and Washington, DC. The student body now includes over 550 students and is celebrated as one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation. Although borne of racial segregation, the Law School has a rich and brilliant history of triumph, adversity, transition, growth and development. We enter the 21st Century with a continued commitment to promote excellence and expand opportunity. The year 2010 marks the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the School of Law.

An important aspect of the Law School's mission is to attract capable persons from diverse backgrounds. NCCU Law seeks students who are committed to public service and to meeting the needs of the underserved. Students receive a comprehensive legal education which treasures diversity and encourages freedom of expression.

Mission

The mission of the North Carolina Central University School of Law is to provide a challenging and broad-based educational program designed to stimulate intellectual inquiry of the highest order, and to foster in each student a deep sense of professional responsibility and personal integrity so as to produce competent and socially responsible members of the legal profession.

In achieving this mission, the Law School subscribes to the following joint statement of the American Bar Association, the Association of American Law Schools, and the Law School Admissions Council:

[A] student body that is diverse with respect to sex, ethnicity and race, and economic, educational and experiential backgrounds is essential to a quality legal education. Ours is a diverse society, and thus law students, before entering the legal profession, must obtain both a wide range of perspectives concerning the impact of law on various segments of our population, and a deeper understanding of law and justice in this increasingly complex society.

This statement is particularly poignant for a law school founded to educate African Americans. In keeping with its historical role, an important aspect of the Law School's mission is to attract capable persons from diverse backgrounds who are committed to public service and to meeting the needs of people and communities that are underserved by or that are under-represented in the legal profession.

Deans

Maurice T. Van Hecke (1939-1942) acted as dean while serving simultaneously as dean of the School of Law at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Albert L. Turner (1942-1965) became the first African American to serve as dean in 1942. He served as full time dean for 23 years. Dean Turner established a sense of community at the school and was able to organize the first Alumni Association.

Daniel G. Sampson (1965-1969) served as dean in one of the Law School's most controversial periods when efforts surfaced to close the Law School. Dean Sampson argued convincingly to maintain the school in the following response to the UNC General Administration:

It is not enough merely to say that qualified Blacks have the opportunity for admission to other law schools. The fact remains that they cannot gain admission in substantial numbers . . . . More and more law schools are limiting their enrollment to the top 5 or 10 percent of college graduating classes. Consequently, the student graduating in the lower-upper, or middle part of his class from any college is finding his source of obtaining a legal education diminishing. Because of this factor, North Carolina College Law School is in a unique position of performing an invaluable service to worthy and deserving students as well as contributing to the general welfare of the State.
LeMarquis DeJarmon (1969-1976) had to maintain the law school literally after a disgruntled student started a fire that heavily damaged the facility. The law school was relocated from the Hoey Administration building to the William Jones building.

Harry E. Groves (1976-1981) supervised the move into the current location in the Albert L. Turner Building, appealed for more equitable funding for the school, and was the guiding force behind the creation of the evening program.

Charles E. Dave (1981-1985) combined opportunity with excellence and enhanced the academic program, challenging faculty and students to embrace more rigorous, competitive standards than ever before. The percentage of law school graduates taking the North Carolina Bar Association examination increased to 82% compared to the statewide bar passage rate of 79%. He implemented the plans for the evening program.

Thomas M. Ringer (1985-1986) served an interim term and responded to yet another effort to close the school. He was successful in preserving the integrity of the program.

Louis Westerfield (1986-1990) continued the strong emphasis on providing a broad-based legal education where diversity is treasured and freedom of expression is urged.

Mary E. Wright (1990-1994) was the first female dean of the Law School and continued the tradition of providing opportunity for African Americans and students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds.

Percy R. Luney, Jr. (1994-1998) focused on the role of the Law School in the community by strengthening the faculty’s commitment to teaching and public service. Under his leadership, the Law School opened its new Model Law Clinic to provide students an opportunity to gain practical experience in helping community members to resolve real life problems. The Law School established its first endowed chair in 1995.

Janice L. Mills (1998-2005) guided the $9.2 million dollar renovation of the Turner Law Building, which added 88,000 square feet to the existing structure.

Raymond C. Pierce (2005-Present) has effectively managed the law school’s growth which has included the largest student enrollment in the school’s history, an expanded faculty, a significantly increased state budget allocation, and the completion of the final stages of a building renovation and new construction addition to the law school facility. He has directed the law school’s successful accreditation confirmation by the American Bar Association, inclusion on the Princeton Review List of Top Law Schools, and number one ranking from National Jurist Pre Law Magazine for Best Value Law School based on bar passage rate, job placement and affordability. Dean Pierce has lead the development of the first two institutes at the law school—the Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Law Institute and the Dispute Resolution Institute. The Veteran’s Law Clinic has received national recognition for providing legal assistance to U.S. Soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Facility

The School of Law is located on the campus of North Carolina Central University at the corner of Cecil Street and South Alston Avenue in the Albert L. Turner Building, a four-story brick structure with 87,672 square feet of space. Recently renovated and expanded, Turner Law Building contains state-of-the art moot courtrooms, an expanded model law office, five classrooms and a new administrative wing. The Law School has three (3) high tech smart classrooms with seating capacities of 126, 123 and 80; three high tech smart court rooms with seating capacities of 139, 28 and 18; two distance learning classrooms, and two high tech smart seminar rooms.

The Law Library contains over 280,000 volumes and volume equivalents of research in a comfortable environment for study and research. The ground floor of the building contains individual offices for student organizations, such as the Law Journal and the Student Bar Association, and a student lounge and canteen/vending area. There are two fully-equipped computer labs. Wireless connection is available throughout the building. The newly-constructed "Great Hall" is one of the major focal points of the building and allows the Law School to comfortably host workshops and other seminars and special events.
Academics

North Carolina Central University School of Law offers two programs leading to the Juris Doctor degree: a full-time day program and a part-time evening program. Twenty-eight full-time professors, clinical instructors, and administrators, including eighteen women and eighteen minorities, work with a number of distinguished adjunct and visiting professors to teach approximately 550 students in both programs. Students who have attended the Law School range in age from twenty to sixty-five and have diverse education, socioeconomic backgrounds and professional experiences.

As a historically African-American institution, we continually seek to enhance our focus on civil rights and to strengthen our ties to the community. The Charles Hamilton Houston Endowed Chair was established to bring a prominent civil rights law professor to the School of Law to lecture in the areas of constitutional and civil rights law. The Chair has been held by such attorneys as Fred Gray, Julius Chambers, Alvin Chambliss, Jr. and Janelle Byrd-Chichester.

Juris Doctor - Day Program

Day Program students must successfully complete six semesters or three academic years for their degree requirements. Acceptance of an admissions offer to the Day Program represents a commitment to the full-time study of law. Any significant employment or involvement outside the School of Law is inconsistent with that commitment. Under American Bar Association Standard 305 (a) (iii), a student may not work in excess of twenty hours per week while attending a law school on a full-time basis. Day Program classes normally meet between 8:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on weekdays in the fall and spring semesters. Some specialized Day Program courses may meet in the evening hours. Clinical litigation courses are offered during the fall and spring semesters and during the summer. A Day Program student may enroll in a regular or summer session or in an Evening Program course with permission from the Dean, if space is available.

Juris Doctor - Evening Program

The Evening Program is designed for particularly enterprising people who seek to earn a law degree while working full time. Evening students come from many professional fields, including academia, medicine, scientific research, law enforcement, government and regulatory work. Admission to the Evening Program means long-term dedication.

The Evening Program requires a significant commitment on the part of its students. The program is four years and meets year round. All classes meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. In order to ensure a well-rounded legal education, 55 of the 88 hours needed to graduate are required classes. These classes are all offered in a regular rotation order. Most substantive classes are offered on an every-other year schedule, so students are expected to complete the program through continuous attendance for eight semesters and six summer sessions. Students who are unable to attend classes on this schedule would most likely have difficulty graduating from the program on time. Generally, required classes are offered during the regular school year and electives are offered during the summer sessions, although nine hours of electives are generally offered during the regular school year rotation. Students are expected to attend both summer sessions each year in order to earn the necessary hours for timely graduation.

The traditional first-year classes are staggered over the first two years of enrollment. Students will take classes their first year with second-year students and in their second year with first-year students. Examination of students' grades over time has shown that there is no negative impact on students' grades from this arrangement. Even with two class years in this arrangement, class size averages 80 students or less.

Joint Degree Programs

North Carolina Central University offers two four-year programs that lead to the award of joint degrees—the J.D./M.L.S. and the J.D./M.B.A programs. To participate in either of these programs, an applicant must apply and be accepted to both the School of Law and the other advanced degree program of his or her choice. Prospective joint-degree students should investigate these options prior to or at the end of their first year of Law School. Students in a joint-degree program must successfully complete all their required first year of study in the School of Law.

Juris Doctor/Master of Library Science

The J.D./M.L.S. Program allows students who are interested in a career in law librarianship to simultaneously pursue the Juris Doctor degree and a Master of Library Science degree. This joint degree option is available to Day and Evening Program students.
Juris Doctor/Master of Business Administration

The J.D./M.B.A. Program is available to Day Program students only. This program enables a Day Program student to receive the Juris Doctor degree and Master of Business Administration degree in four years instead of the usual five years. The Juris Doctor degree is granted upon the completion of a minimum of 88 semester hours of required and elective law school courses. To obtain the Master of Business Administration degree, the School of Business requires a total of 33 semester hours of required and elective courses for the student with an undergraduate business degree meeting all foundation course requirements, or 60 semester hours of required and elective courses for the student who needs credits in the foundation course areas.

Admissions

North Carolina Central University School of Law is a student-oriented place of learning. The School of Law seeks students who are more likely to contribute affirmatively to the learning of others by reason of their intellectual attainments, demonstrated emotional maturity and self-discipline, oral ability, and capacity to benefit from the school's educational program. Applicants who individually have overcome economic, societal or educational obstacles make a very important contribution to the diversity of the student body and serve as role models of achievement. These factors have been shown to be important predictors of success. Applicants selected for admission bring to the School of Law many attributes, including academic credentials, personal and professional experiences, strong analytical and problem-solving abilities, strong writing skills, oral communication and listening abilities, organizational and time management skills, general research skills, and the desire to promote justice and serve others.

The School of Law does not prescribe or endorse any particular pre-law course of study. Our students come from diverse disciplines such as English, philosophy, medicine, dentistry, history, environmental studies, economics, criminal justice, public administration, political science, accounting, music, psychology, engineering, mathematics, chemistry, and biology.

Admission to the School of Law is competitive. Over 2900 applications are received for approximately 170-190 seats in the Day Program, and 35-40 seats in the Evening Program. Students are admitted only for the fall semester. Since we believe that applicants are more than just numbers, selection for admission is based upon a thorough evaluation of all factors in an applicant's file: Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score(s) and writing sample, undergraduate and graduate school grades, recommendations and the personal statement. Careful consideration is given to an applicant's professional experience, volunteer or community service, unusual achievements, special circumstances, honors, economic hardship, undergraduate degree, undergraduate school, graduate degree, graduate school, and grade trends. Because it is presumed that Evening Program students will have full-time employment, the Admissions Committee places greater weight on the quantifiable performance predictors for applicants to the Evening Program.

Accreditation - The North Carolina Central University School of Law is fully accredited by the North Carolina State Bar Council and the American Bar Association.

Clinical Programs - The Clinical Legal Education Program of NCCU School of Law is committed to producing excellent attorneys who are sensitive to addressing the needs of people and communities that are traditionally underserved and underrepresented by the legal profession. Through a diverse body of clinical courses, the School of Law offers students an opportunity to pursue justice in a variety of legal disciplines. The clinical program teaches students to respect the legal process and the dignity of every client, regardless of their station in life. Currently, NCCU School of Law offers eight clinical programs.

Institutes

Dispute Resolution Institute The legal system’s increasing resort to non-adversarial methods of resolving legal disputes reflects not simply dissatisfaction with litigation, but a broader and growing interest in finding new ways to respond to conflict. This search for alternatives presents both opportunities and challenges to our profession and to the way we prepare lawyers for practice. The Dispute Resolution Institute will lead our profession in taking full advantage of these opportunities and responding thoughtfully to these challenges.

Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Law Institute The NCCU Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Law Institute, through its multi-disciplinary approach in teaching, research and publications, has been established as a center of excellence in the field of biotechnology and pharmaceutical law. Through its achievements, the Institute’s mission is to make substantial contributions to the development of global biotechnology and pharmaceutical law and to the investigation and examination of contemporary U.S. regulatory affairs issues.
The NCCU School of Law Board of visitors is comprised of alumni, non-alumni in the business and legal community, and the current sitting Student Bar Association President. The mission of the Board is 1) to serve in an advisory capacity on existing and emerging issues of the Law School; 2) to promote the contributions of the Law School within the legal community in North Carolina and across the United States; and 3) to assist with strategic planning and program evaluation of the School of Law. In addition, the board has the responsibility of helping to raise money in support of the Law School.

Prepared by Ms. Iris W. Gilchrist
September 22, 2008