Maurer School of Law Marks 175 Years of History

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Maurer School of Law marks 175 years of history

By Austen L. Parrish

One hundred seventy-five years ago this summer, the trustees of Indiana University hired David McDonald as the first faculty member of the Law Department — the first public law school in the Midwest, the ninth law school in the nation, and the university's first professional school.

In December of that year, in his inaugural lecture, McDonald stressed the importance of law and the responsibility of those who administer it. Here was his charge to an assembly of students, faculty and Bloomington townspeople: "If you are willing to endure the labor of mastering this noble science; if you are willing to spurn the trifles that engage the time and affections of too many of our youth ...; if you desire to be distinguished among your fellow citizens and useful to our beloved country — here is a field in which you may, at once, gratify a laudable ambition and promote the best interests of society."

The curriculum, environment and composition of today's I. U. Maurer School of Law bear little resemblance to the school that Judge McDonald assembled in 1842. Indeed, recent innovations have been so significant that our educational program bears little resemblance to that of even a decade ago. And yet, in fundamental ways, McDonald's charge that day in December continues to ring true.

Through hard work, public service and a commitment to making the world a better place, our school proudly claims a continuous tradition of producing lawyers who make a difference and promote the best interests of society. Here are just a few examples.

Faculty teacher-scholars

Depending on when you may have graduated from I. U. Maurer, some of these names may be familiar to you: Clifford, Dickerson, Fuchs, Gavit, Getman, Hall, Harper, McNutt. Alumni from the '50s through the present day will remember these giants from the classroom: Baude, Bradley, Boshkoff, Dworkin, Garth, Nolan, Oliver, Prater, Scanlan and Schornhorst, among others. Now there's a new generation of faculty whose scholarship addresses some of the most important issues of the day and whose teaching is winning accolades from our students. Faculty hired in the past five years include Jessica Eaglin (criminal law and sentencing), Pamela Foohey (creditors' rights), Gina-Gail Fletcher (corporate law), David Gamage (tax law and policy), Victor Quintanilla (procedure, law and social psychology), Michael Mattioli (intellectual property), Tim Lovelace (legal history and civil rights), and Steve Sanders (constitutional law). These and other talented professors are carrying forward a tradition of excellence as national scholars and highly gifted and caring teachers. Their research also shows a deep appreciation for interdisciplinary work, bringing together law and a wide range of disciplines.

A diverse, welcoming community

As a public school, our law school has long embraced its mission of providing opportunities for aspiring lawyers from all walks of life. In 1890, Tamar Althouse (Scholz) enrolled as the school's first woman student at the age of 17. At the time, only eight state universities, including Indiana, accepted women students. For many years, she was the (continued on page 30)
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only woman lawyer in Evansville, so she sought out women colleagues for support, which led to her co-founding the Women’s Rotary in Evansville, the first such organization in the country. Other alumnae went on to prominent firsts in the legal profession, including the Hon. Juanita Kidd Stout, the first African American woman elected to any judgeship in the United States and the first to serve on the supreme court of any state; Hon. Shirley Abrahamson, the first woman on the Wisconsin Supreme Court and later its chief justice; Hon. Loretta Rush, the first woman to serve as Chief Justice of Indiana; Hon. V. Sue Shields, the first woman named to the Indiana Court of Appeals; and Lauren Robel, the first female dean of the law school.

The inclusiveness in our law school community appears throughout its history in other ways, too. Masuji Miyakawa, class of 1905, was the school’s first Asian-American graduate and became the first Japanese American admitted to the bar in the United States. Samuel Saul Dargan, 1909, was the first African American graduate, and Juan T. Santos, 1916, was the first Hispanic law graduate. In 1969 the Black Law Students Association formed a chapter at the law school, followed by the Women’s Law Caucus the following year. The law school has also one of the oldest foreign LLM programs in the nation. Beginning in 1936, ours became one of the first schools in the United States to train Chinese lawyers, and throughout its history our LLM graduates have gone on to distinguish themselves in their home countries all over the world. One example is the Hon. Florida Ruth Pineda-Romero, a former associate justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines.

The arc of diversity reached a new height with the 2016 entering class—a majority of the class are women, 27 percent are persons of color, and they came to I.U. from more than 30 states. In our foreign LLM program, students hail from 25-30 countries. While the Harvard Law Review recently publicized that it elected its first black, woman president, the three leaders of our flagship journals—this year the Indiana Law Journal, the Journal of Global Legal Studies and the Journal of Law and Social Equality—are all led by students of color, and the chief justice of our Sherman Minton Moot Court is an African American woman. This year, our Black Law Students Association (BLSA) received the regional chapter of the year award, the fifth time in six years (besting 52 other associations in the Midwest). The school’s Latino, BLSA and LGBT alumni advisory boards play a key role in the school with mentoring and other programs, and last year we celebrated the 12th Annual Black/Latino Alumni & Student Reception, hosted by Prof. Kevin Brown and his wife, Dianne. We remain the only law school to have scholarship partnerships with the country’s leading women’s colleges and pipeline programs with a number of undergraduate diversity programs and with the U.S. Army JAG Corps.

Curricular innovation

The process of earning a law degree is radically different from what it was in 1842. Texts such as Blackstone’s Commentaries and Kent’s Commentaries formed the basis for additional tutelage in a practicing attorney’s office. It wasn’t until 1936 that the state of Indiana required a law degree as a prerequisite for sitting for the bar exam, bringing to an end the tradition of “reading law.” Dean Bernard Gavit worked tirelessly to persuade the state to tighten the rules of admission.

Today’s law school curriculum reflects the broad scope of the law and the ways in which a new lawyer can ply her skills. In addition to the core courses we all remember from the first couple of years—torts, contracts, criminal law, evidence, con law—our students can choose from one of 17 areas of focus.
in everything from administrative law to information privacy to tax. We offer seven clinics, six pro bono projects, and eight externship experiences, including a semester in Washington, D.C., and our Stewart Fellows program, where students spend the summer working in externships in law, business or nonprofit organizations in one of eight countries. Our unique Legal Profession course teaches first-year students the law of lawyering in context by examining practice settings, law firm norms and non-doctrinal skills that all successful lawyers need: judgment, project management, client relations and teamwork. We now offer specialized tracks in this course in private, government and global practice areas. The course is paired with an innovative peer-mentoring program and career choices panels, where alumni and local leaders give students a sense of the different ways law is practiced.

Learning doesn’t just happen in the classroom, as the law school plays a significant role as a provider of pro bono legal services in our communities. For instance, students in Prof. Victor Quintanilla’s first-year civil procedure brought that often-dusty course to life by developing proposals for improving the delivery of legal services to lesser-served communities. Another example: our newly established veterans’ disability law clinic, directed by Prof. Carwina Weng, in which our students assist low-income clients with claims involving Social Security, veterans and Medicaid disability benefits.

Alumni

Our school proudly claims many illustrious alumni—senators, members of Congress, ambassadors, judges and dozens of elected officials. Some of the more famous names from our history include Hon. Sherman Minton, class of 1915, who served on the U.S. Supreme Court from 1949–1956; Hoagy Carmichael, ’26, who composed “Stardust” across the street from the law school; and Wendell Willkie, class of 1916, the 1940 Republican presidential nominee. In more recent years, our school has benefited from the incredible generosity of alumni whose success in the legal profession and in business have enabled us to provide scholarship funding for almost every student who needs it and to plan for long-term facilities expansion. Among these generous donors are Michael S. “Mickey” Maurer, ’67, whose $35 million gift in 2009 led to the naming of the school in his honor; Lowell E. Baier, ’64, whose $20 million gift in 2015 we recognized by naming the law building in his name; and Milton, ’71, and Judi Stewart, donors of $7.7 million and the namesake of our Center on the Global Legal Profession. A large number of alumni have contributed to supporting the school’s research mission. While for other schools, costs keep increasing, as a result of alumni generosity, we remain one of the most affordable top-ranked public schools in the nation. Just as important, we continue to be astounded and gratified every year by the nearly 1,000 alumni who volunteer to make our school a better place, by judging moot court, mentoring students, hosting receptions and serving on our alumni advisory boards.

Prof. McDonald would not recognize the law school if he were able to visit it today, but I’m convinced that he’d be impressed by its accomplishments over the past 175 years. And if past is prologue, there’s much more to come.

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