

## **SPOTLIGHT ON TENNESSEE LAW SCHOOLS**

### **New Developments at the Vanderbilt Law School**

By Gray Proctor

Vanderbilt University's Law School has always offered students an excellent legal education. As the school has become more national in focus, its students have become a more diverse group. The 190 students who make up the class of 2009 represent 109 undergraduate colleges from 35 states and three foreign countries; boast a median GPA of 3.7; and median LSAT score of 166. Under the leadership of Dean Ed Rubin, now in the second year of his tenure, Vanderbilt is meeting the challenge of keeping up with its students by expanding opportunities for growth and exploration while maintaining its rigorous standards in education, research and collegial atmosphere.

#### **Academic Offerings**

The single most important development within recent memory at the law school is, no doubt, the establishment of the nation's first Ph.D. program in law and economics. Kip Viscusi and Joni Hersch, two of the country's leading scholars in law and economics, head this cutting-edge degree program. While the program is directed to students pursuing careers in universities, research institutions and government, any interested student can benefit from the new course offerings. The program also brings a new academic journal, *The Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, to Vanderbilt.

Vanderbilt has also improved the depth of its offerings in more traditional areas. Renowned litigation scholar Richard Nagareda heads the Cecil D. Branstetter Civil Litigation and Dispute Resolution Program. Funded by a \$2.9 million *cy pres* class-action settlement negotiated by the Nashville law firm of Branstetter, Kilgore, Stranch & Jennings, the program funds and oversees research projects, course development and academic symposia. Students have noticed an immediate impact: litigation-related offerings have more than doubled and Vanderbilt now offers a specialization in litigation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR). The student-run ADR Association also has started entering students in the ABA's Arbitration, Negotiation and Client Counseling competitions.

#### **Faculty Research**

Law school faculty members continue to lead in their respective fields. The law school is particularly proud of its grant-winning researchers. A team composed of professors Margaret Blair, Randall Thomas, Bob Thompson, Larry Helfer and Erin O'Hara secured a \$609,500 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Corporation to pursue a series of projects examining the international role of American corporations. Charles Speir Professor of Law Nancy J. King received a \$250,000 grant from the National Institute of Justice (the research arm of the U.S. Department of Justice) to complete a study of the processing of *habeas corpus* cases in U.S. district courts. The project will make available, for the first time, empirical data on the effects of the federal Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act.

#### **Legal Clinic Programs**

Vanderbilt's Legal Clinic is also plowing new ground with its first clinic in intellectual property and the arts. Capitalizing on Nashville's status as "Music City, U.S.A.," the clinic gives students

a rare opportunity to work directly with clients on copyright and related issues. Another new offering is the International Law Practice Lab, which offers students a chance to learn skills such as treaty negotiation and international law research. The new clinics are a welcome addition to long-standing clinics in business, civil law, criminal law, domestic violence, juvenile law and community and economic development. The school also now offers credit for work at qualified legal aid organizations during the semester.

### **Public Interest Opportunities**

Vanderbilt recently has renewed and enhanced its commitment to encouraging public interest lawyers. While the Legal Aid Society has always raised funds to provide stipends for students doing pro-bono work over the summers, Dean Rubin has begun a policy of institutional fund matching. Student Lauren Loew has founded the Vanderbilt Street Law program, which teaches classes on practical law at local homeless shelters. Another example of the school's commitment in this arena is the presence of Adjunct Professor Roger Conner. Professor Conner is a 30-year veteran of establishing and leading public interest groups. In addition to heading the Project on Leadership, Advocacy and Cooperation, he teaches "Non-litigation Strategies for Change in Public and Social Policy." The school's emphasis has produced results: Chris Yerian was awarded a 2007 Skadden Fellowship to represent children in TennCare disputes at the Tennessee Justice Center. The award, which is extremely competitive, provides a salary, benefits and tuition debt assistance for two years.

These developments are only the tip of the iceberg at Vanderbilt Law School. However, they speak loudly of the school's commitment to adding more diverse opportunities for students to pursue individual ambitions without sacrificing academic rigor or the collegial atmosphere that makes Vanderbilt unique among the nation's top law schools.

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