

UNT Dallas College of Law

Royal Furgeson, dean



The Great Recession laid an egg at our doorstep as we prepared to open the UNT Dallas College of Law in August 2014. It was the worst of times in legal education. Business as usual was no longer in the cards. In light of escalating student debt, rising tuition costs, and uncertain job prospects, we chose to create something different.

For a new law school, institutional costs and processes are not a roadblock to change. We structured our costs with the new reality in mind and prioritized affordable tuition. Our 2015 entering class of 139 law students pays yearly tuition of \$14,565, compared to the 2013 national average of \$23,879 for resident students in public law schools and \$41,985 for private law schools. We charge every student the same tuition at the same rate for their entire course of study, whether full time or part time.

Affordable tuition is not only about debt. It is also about access to legal education for underserved populations and working people. Minorities represent around 50 percent of our students. About 40 percent of our students are enrolled in our part-time program. The average age of our students is over 30 years.

We consciously admit students on a holistic basis. While we give due regard to LSAT scores and GPA, we also consider interviews, life experiences, written statements, and recommendations. Using this approach, we have admitted many nontraditional students, some of whom have been out of higher education for more than a couple of years. Our students come from every walk of life and display the distinguishing qualities necessary to be good lawyers.

For more than a decade, thoughtful educators

FOUNDED
2014

ENROLLMENT
273

ANNUAL TUITION
\$14,565

ANNUAL FEES
\$506

**NUMBER OF GRADUATES
IN 2000**
N/A

**NUMBER OF GRADUATES
IN 2015**
N/A

**PERCENTAGE OF 2014 GRADUATES
WHO HAD JOBS BY
APRIL 2015**
N/A

**PERCENTAGE OF 2014 GRADUATES
WITH FULL-TIME, J.D.-
REQUIRED/J.D.-ADVANTAGE
JOBS THAT WERE SUBSIDIZED
BY THE LAW SCHOOL**
N/A

**AVERAGE DEBT LOAD
OF A 2014 GRADUATE**
N/A

have recommended changes to the law school instructional model. Since we started from scratch, we wrote on a blank slate, allowing us to consider the full array of recommendations and to implement the ones most applicable to us. While some are limited in scope, others are far-reaching. Space allows me to highlight only one.

From time immemorial, law schools have administered a single test—at the end of the semester—for each course. Here, we administer tests on a regular basis. In any given course, our law students can expect to take several low-stakes quizzes, a midterm, and a final exam.

Current research shows that this approach strengthens learning and retention. It also increases studying before and attentiveness during class, enables students to better calibrate what they know, and helps reduce test anxiety among students because no single exam is a make-or-break event. Most importantly, this kind of testing enables instructors to identify gaps in students' understanding and adapt accordingly—before it is too late. Our goal is to provide an excellent legal education geared to practice-related competencies with a teaching-focused faculty. Since preparation for the bar exam is an important part of this, we offer a limited number of electives. In addition, every member of our full-time faculty has practiced law for at least four years and most for much longer, allowing us to provide our students with a wide range of instruction in both doctrine and the applied arts. Our learning environment is robust and rigorous.

Finally, we encourage our students to consider the path less traveled. Retired Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson and Chief Justice Nathan Hecht have both spoken eloquently about the “justice gap” in our society, where our middle class and small businesses struggle to find legal representation. Addressing this gap is one of the great challenges of our profession. We strive to enlighten our students about these issues and to open their eyes to the life-changing opportunities that often accompany them.

We are a work in progress at UNT Dallas College of Law. We realize the solemn responsibility that we have been given, and we approach our task with humility, dedication, and diligence.



ROYAL FURGESON

is the founding dean of the UNT Dallas College of Law, located in downtown Dallas. He graduated from law school in 1967, served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1969, clerked for U.S. District Judge Halbert O. Woodward from 1969 to 1970, practiced trial law in El Paso from 1970 to 1994, and served as a U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Texas and then for the Northern District of Texas from 1994 to 2013.