



New Law Schools To Help Fill Lawyer Gap, Bolster Legal Education

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RALEIGH, N.C. -- From afternoon teas to night classes, North Carolina's two new law schools promise a friendly approach to educating future lawyers.

Elon University opened a law school Thursday for 115 students at a revamped public library in downtown Greensboro. The Charlotte School of Law will become the state's first for-profit law school when it opens later this month with 75 to 100 students.

North Carolina for decades has had five law schools, located at Campbell, Duke, N.C. Central and Wake Forest universities and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"The complexity of our society means that we're likely to need more lawyers," said Jack Boger, dean of the law school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Leary Davis, dean of the Elon law school who was the founding dean at Campbell University's law school in 1975, said there's evidence North Carolina is importing lawyers from elsewhere.

Over the past two summers, the number of out-of-state law students taking the state's bar exam exceeded the number of in-state students taking the test, according to the N.C. Board of Law Examiners.

Elon and Charlotte will probably turn out at least 200 graduates each year.

Elon, a private school, attracted more than 500 applicants for its inaugural class, while 300 people applied for six teaching jobs.

Gene Clark, dean of the Charlotte School of Law, said it received 1,000 applicants from students. The school is part of a for-profit consortium called InfiLaw System, which operates schools in Jacksonville, Fla., and Scottsdale, Ariz.

Officials at both new law schools, which each charge about \$26,000 a year in tuition, say they will emphasize a close connection to the local legal community and on their students' total education experience.

On Thursdays at Elon, for instance, local lawyers and judges will mingle with students at an afternoon tea.

Elon's dean, Leary Davis, who was the founding dean at Campbell University's law school in 1975, said he hopes to change the tone at the school to one of support rather than intimidation.

To do this, Elon plans to follow the teaching style used in medical schools, where doctors help guide students. More than 60 lawyers have agreed to take on two students for coaching.

"One of the things we think we can do to take legal education to the next level is to make sure the students get constant, constructive feedback," he said.

At Charlotte School of Law, which opens Aug. 28, the focus will be more on students rather than a professors' publishing and research, Clark said. The goal is to produce "practice-ready" lawyers, he said.

"We are unashamedly practical in our approach," he added.

The school, which has not yet worked out its specialties, expects to focus on regional needs such as banking or sports and entertainment law. It will offer part-time, full-time and night instruction.

Both Elon and Charlotte have assembled advisory boards that include legal scholars, former state supreme court justices, former governors and other notables.

Elon's dedication ceremony on Sept. 19 will feature a speech by former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Boger says the new schools will likely benefit all law students in the state.

"I think it will probably be very helpful for all of us to look at what we're doing and make sure we have our best game on," Boger said. "The students are likely to be the beneficiaries of that."

On the Net:

Elon University School of Law: <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/law>

Charlotte School of Law: <http://www.charlottelaw.org>