



A LIVING LAW SCHOOL TURNS 100 / CALIFORNIA WESTERN SCHOOL OF LAW

“A Law School is a living social organism. The many people deeply involved are responsible for, and become a permanent part of, this living Law School.” – Dean Robert K. Castetter



This living law school, California Western School of Law (or California Western, or Cal Western, or CWSL), has taken on many forms in its hundred-year history—many names, many locations. This law school has evolved alongside the century it’s seen, embracing change at every turn—in the law, in the economy, in technology, in social consciousness. What has not changed in the school’s hundred years is that the many people deeply involved in it remain committed to nurturing practice-ready advocates who are eager to serve the community. Wherever this law school’s halls may have happened to be—the old Grey Castle of San Diego High School, the picturesque campus in Point Loma, or the historic landmark building at 350 Cedar St.—the people who have walked down these halls have sought to make California Western a place where ambitious students become competent and compassionate lawyers and leaders.

1924

San Diego Chiropractic College given accreditation

1927

Leland Ghent Stanford, Jr. given accreditation to teach Bar prep class at San Diego Evening High. Signs outside the classrooms read “Balboa Law College.”

1934

First scholarship program established

1945

Dean Dwight E. Stanford uses his own money to help returning GIs pay for law school

1948

First Law student government formed

1949

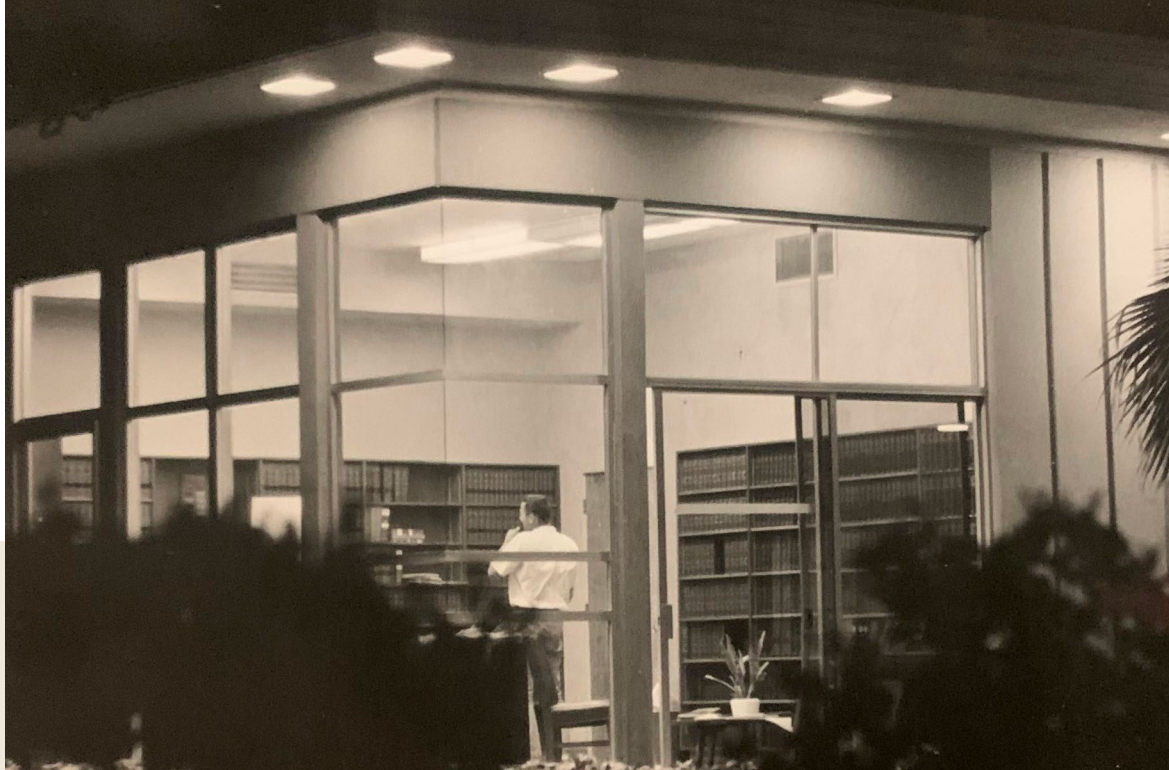
Omega Beta Beta, legal fraternity formed to promote scholarship and ties between students and alumni

1950

Balboa Law College becomes Balboa University

1952

Balboa changes name to California Western University



Leland Ghent Stanford, Jr. would likely find California Western School of Law unrecognizable as it stands today—three buildings stretched across a full city block, at the heart of the eighth largest city in the United States, itself a metropolis with booming health care and biotechnology industries. Yet the evening bar prep class that Stanford began teaching at San Diego High School a hundred years ago is the beginning of this living law school’s tradition of equipping students with the practical skills they need to thrive as attorneys.

By 1927, Stanford’s evening class had been renamed Balboa Law College and was the only law school south of Los Angeles. Stanford’s students came from all walks of life, as do

California Western’s today. DeWitt A. Higgs, one of the school’s first three graduates, hailed from a small town in Idaho, never completed his undergraduate degree, and drove a dynamite truck by day to attend Balboa at night. Looking back on his time in law school, Higgs said, “I was primarily interested in developing the skills to become a trial lawyer”—and that is what he got. In 1939, he cofounded the law firm that would become Higgs Fletcher & Mack, a pillar of the San Diego legal community for over 80 years and, today, one of the largest firms in the city. Among much else, Higgs was San Diego’s first representative on the University of California Board of Regents and a longtime member of California Western’s Board of Trustees.

1964
On May 29, 1964, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at the Point Loma campus of California Western School of Law to advocate for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and against Proposition 14 to repeal the Fair Housing Act of 1963.



1958 Reopening of California Western University School of Law, housed in downtown building (1729 Fifth Avenue)

1962 Construction of Rohr Hall completed
Move to Point Loma campus
Law school is granted ABA accreditation (record-setting at the time for speed)

1963 First student publication, *La Balanza*, published (published until 1970, replaced by *Commentary*)

1965 First issue of *Law Review* published

1966 Dean Robert K. Casterter establishes Mexican Law Program
Appellate Moot Court program launched

1967 California Western becomes member of the AALS

1968 Name changed to California Western School of Law of United States International University



Over these hundred years, California Western students have often come to campus without the elite credentials or legal legacies of others around the country. The first scholarship fund was created in 1934 and, starting in the 1940s—and straight through to today—the school has made sure that GI Bill funds cover a significant portion if not all of tuition for veterans. When veterans couldn't afford to pay, Dwight E. Stanford, the school's second dean, paid for their tuition with his own money. This is a quality that has remained in this law school's deans, faculty, and staff for a century—they care for their students' education and for their wellbeing.

What often sets a CWSL student apart is that their background has given them ambition to use the law in ways that will uplift others. Whether they have been veterans or immigrants, whether they have come to the law as a second or third career. Whether they are the first in their family to go to law school or the first to attend college, this law school has nurtured them all. John G. Ronis, a first-generation Greek American graduated from this law school (then Balboa University) in 1950. When he passed the bar, he became the first Greek lawyer in San Diego

and a pillar of the city's Greek and legal communities for over 60 years. His son Jan Ronis '72 became a San Diego institution himself, and one of the most well-known and highly respected lawyers in the criminal defense community.

In 1960, Robert K. Castetter was appointed dean of the law school (then a part of California Western University). Dean Castetter, with a keen eye for professorial talent and firm warmth with students, ushered the institution into its modern era. Professors appointed by Dean Castetter laid the foundation of the school's approach to curriculum: practice-ready

first. The 1960s birthed innovative courses in trial practice, arbitration, mediation, and practice formation; clinics that served the community and gave students critical hands-on training; the California Western Law Review and the International Law Journal (one of the first in the country); and competitive moot court teams that now have half a century of success behind them.

One would be hard-pressed to find an alumnus from this period who did not feel that they had received a rigorous, practice-centered, and personalized legal education. You might also struggle to find a professor, staff member, or student who didn't feel



1970 The first *California Western International Law Journal* published (one of very few among American law schools at the time)

1971 Professor Gafford and Louis Brown establish the Emil Brown Mock Law Office Competition (later Client Counseling Competition)

1973 Relocation to downtown campus at 350 Cedar Street.

1973-74 350 Building remodeled; work largely done by students

1975 July 1, 1975, became a nonprofit public benefit corporation under the name California Western School of Law.

Ended affiliation with US International University

1979 Chin Kim, director of law school library, who helped create a professional law library, established Master of Comparative Law program

Main building designated a Historical Landmark



1985

Rev. Jesse Jackson spoke at California Western's Economic Development Symposium, February 22, 1985



that they'd had a personal hand in shaping what the school was becoming. In the early 1970s, when the school moved from its campus in Point Loma into the building at 350 Cedar St., it was students and professors who showed up to do the moving. And it was students, with previous (or concurrent) careers as carpenters, painters, and glassworkers, who remodeled the interior of the building, turning it from a performing arts school into a contemporary law school. In 1975, the school separated from what was then United States International University (formerly California Western University), becoming the independent nonprofit California Western School of Law.

In the 1980s and '90s, under the guidance of Deans Ernest C. Friesen and Michael H. Dessent, California Western School of Law, which had started as an evening bar class, became a vital institution in the San Diego legal community. This period saw the expansion of curriculum to include concentrations in burgeoning legal fields—business and labor law, biotechnology and patent law, entertainment, and international law. In 1987, the school established its Diversity Admissions program (which became a model for others around the country), and California Western's student body quickly became one of the most diverse in the nation—and

remains so today. These years saw the development of robust internship and externship programs, creating a network of CWSL alumni that has reached every sector of the profession in San Diego and throughout the country. California Western alumni now represent a significant percentage of local attorneys and judges.

Roberta "Bobbie" Thyfault (p. 16) graduated from California Western in 1984 and immediately found success as a criminal defense appellate attorney, arguing on behalf of her clients in district, state, and federal courts. In 1999, like so many alumni before her and since, Bobbie returned to this law school, looking to give back. This year, to honor her 25 years of teaching legal skills and coaching students in the Competitive Advocacy Program, the Moot Court Honors Board named an intraschool appellate competition after her. The many people deeply involved are responsible for, and become a permanent part of, this living law school.

1980

Visiting Scholars and Jurist-in-Residence programs created: Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist spent a week at the school

1986

International Legal Studies Program established

1987

AI Simon Center for Telecommunications Law (one of the first such programs in the nation)

The Center for Intellectual Property, Technology and Telecommunications established

Diversity Admissions Program established Program, which became a model for law schools throughout the nation.

1988

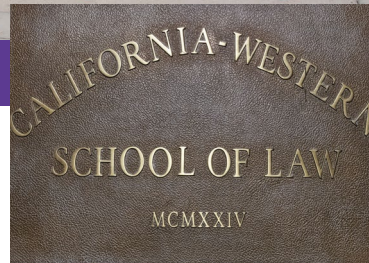
First endowment in the school's history.

1992

San Diego Biotechnology Forum founded.

1993

Completion of the 225 Cedar Street Building in 1993, the law school added new offices for faculty and administrative departments, the Swortwood Bookstore, a deli-style cafeteria, the Casterter Courtyard, and an additional 31,500 square feet of underground parking.



From the mid-'90s through the 2010s, with Deans Steven R. Smith and Niels B. Schaumann at the helm, California Western School of Law continued to evolve alongside the city it had grown up with. STEPPS, the Competitive Advocacy Program, the Community Law Project, New Media Rights, the Trademark Clinic, the Innocence and Justice Clinic (formerly the California Innocence Project)—these are just some of the programs that arose during this time, branching out further into the community and nurturing generations of highly skilled advocates. When Yasmine Djawadian (p. 25) graduated from CWSL in 2009 amidst a global recession, she felt she'd been given the knowledge, skills, and confidence to immediately start her own personal injury firm. In just 15 years, Yasmine and her team have secured over \$1 billion in damages for her clients. "It was up to me to grind," says Yasmine—a sentiment that permeates our law school's culture, each classroom, each clinic filled with students looking to take full advantage of the opportunities they are given. And Yasmine says, "I owe CWSL my career and livelihood."

In 2020, when Sean M. Scott became president and dean of California Western School of Law, the first person of color and the first woman to hold these positions, she set a bold new vision for the school as it approached its centennial. Educating competent and compassionate lawyers remains the core of the school's mission; the how of that education continues to evolve to meet the needs of the moment. In 2022, California Western received its largest single gift in school history—\$3 million from Elaine Galinson and Herb Solomon—a fund that endows a professorship and speaker series to ensure that students at CWSL will be part of the national antiracism conversation. Last year, California Western introduced the Law, Justice, and Technology Initiative, which will bring in experts in the field and enhance course offerings, so that students gain mastery in the latest lawyering technologies and in the critical questions of justice that new technologies pose to society. Starting this fall, the school's part-time program will now take place in the

1996

Dennis Avery '70 and Sally Avery Wong '83 gift \$1.4 million to the school (first \$1 million gift) for international programs

Creation of joint Master's degree with UCSD medical school

1997

McGill Center for Creative Program Solving established with \$750,000 grant from the Weingart Foundation

1999

California Western Innocence and Justice Clinic (formerly California Innocence Project) founded

Proyecto Acceso launched

2000

New law library building at 290 Cedar Street opens, dedicated by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy.

2005

Community Law Project founded

2007

New Media Rights founded

2012

Access to Law Initiative launched

2012

Trademark Clinic founded



evening to better serve students who work during the day and have families to support while they pursue their legal dreams, as Dewitt Higgs did nearly a century ago.

When Zarina Sementelli 3L (p. 30) and Ayham Dahlan 3L (p.18) graduate next spring, they will have received three years of rigorous training from their professors through their internships, externships, and clinical experiences. And, of course, they will have helped the school to grow alongside them—the two created the First-Generation Students Association, Zarina its first president, Ayham its first vice president. The two will enter the profession practice-ready, and they will represent the very best of what this living law school has been for 100 years—and what it is becoming.

2020

Sean M. Scott becomes President and Dean, the first person of color and first woman to hold these positions at the school

2022

\$3m gift (largest in school history) made by Elaine Galinson and Herb Solomon

2023

Launch of Law, Justice, and Technology Initiative

2024

California Western School of Law celebrates 100 years



Leland G. Stanford (founder)
1924-1938



Dwight E. Stanford
1939-1949



Charles D. Holliday
1949-1952



Lloyd C. Swortwood
1958-1959



Robert K. Castetter
1960-1980



Ernest C. Friesen
1980-1985



Michael H. Dessent
1986-1996



Steven R. Smith
1996-2012



Niels B. Schumann
2012-2020



Sean M. Scott
2020-Present

