

# Stanford Law School

By Christopher J. Sandersfeld

On the heels of the U.S. News and World Report rankings of the best graduate schools in the country, many law schools clamored to assure and warn their students (and potential applicants) to take them with a grain of salt, since these rankings are fundamentally flawed. The Stanford Law School was no exception, but it was also quick to point out that it fared "pretty well" according to the magazine's standards. And, indeed, that is perhaps one of the greatest understatements to emerge from that school.

Placed in the number three spot, behind Yale and Harvard, Stanford's law program has made quite a name for itself since its creation in 1893. Beginning as an undergraduate subject, the program rapidly outgrew itself and developed into a graduate course of study. The first professional degrees then were first conferred in 1901, and in 1908 the Law Department formally became the School of Law. The school currently grants the professional J.D. (Juris Doctor) degree, the advanced J.S.D. (Doctor of the Science of Law), and two Master's degrees. The J.D. degree, Stanford's most popular law program, typically lasts three years assuming a normal course of study is taken. This is preceded by at least four years of undergraduate work, culminating in a Bachelor's degree, and most often, a few years of work experience. Stanford Law students typically have a wide variety of undergraduate experiences, and the school encourages this diversity with the knowledge that it fosters not only the university spirit, but the vitality of the legal profession as well.

Stanford prides itself on its diverse student body. Numbering over 600, the student body is drawn from nearly every state in the nation and more than 16 countries. Nearly forty-five percent of last year's entering class is female, and approximately a third are members of minority groups (African-American, Native American, Latino, and Asian). The students also come from a wide variety of schools of colleges, including public and private, foreign and domestic, and first tier and second tier schools. This diversity lends to the school's openness and harmony, or what the Dean of the Law School Paul Brest calls "a community of discourse."

Besides being diverse, Stanford's student body is academically one of the top in the country. Stanford is one of the most selective law schools in the country, admitting under five percent of their applicants. Out of the 4,300 applicants to the Stanford Law Class of 1998, 176 students were selected. Most accepted students ranked in the upper five percent of both their undergraduate class and the LSAT pool. Besides academic excellence, work experience is also an important factor in the admissions process. Consistently, a large percentage of the freshman class has been out of undergraduate schooling for two or more years. Many applicants have chosen to study law at Stanford in order to enhance their contributions to their chosen career paths, ranging from finance, academia, computer and natural sciences, medicine, and arts and sciences. The Stanford Office of Admissions firmly believes in Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action. It seeks to draw the greatest diversity of people into its school and strongly encourages both minorities and women to apply.

Once admitted to the law school, students will undergo a two year intensive program. The first year is largely prescribed, with students taking a series of courses in

small sections of about thirty. The autumn semester begins with a two day orientation to law and legal procedures and continues with five classes in Civil Procedure, Contracts, Criminal Law, Torts, and Research and Legal Writing. The spring term consists of three required courses (Constitutional Law I, Property, and Research and Legal Writing) and two to four introductory electives. After the first year, students have a much greater opportunity to branch out into those areas and fields that will have the greatest relevance to their future careers. Classes range from Administrative Law and Civil Rights to International Law and Taxation of Business Enterprises.

A history of distinguished faculty have taught at Stanford Law. The first professor was Benjamin Harrison, former president of the United States. Today, Stanford's permanent law faculty is comprised of forty professors, with a similar number of visiting professors and lecturers. The faculty represent a myriad of teaching approaches and legal philosophies. Of the forty permanent faculty, ten are women and five are members of minority groups, giving Stanford Law one of the most diverse law school faculties in the country.

After graduation Stanford graduates have a high rate (98%) of placement, and the alumni are as impressive as the faculty. Stanford Law graduates, now numbering over 7,000, are leaders in their respective professions. The United States Supreme Court currently has two Stanford alumni on its bench, both Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Equally high-ranking graduates include former Secretary of State Warren Christopher; Ann Bingaman, former chief of the Anti-Trust Division of the U.S. Department of Justice; and W. Richard West, founding director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. Other notables include the first mainland Chinese justice to sit on the bench of the International Court of Justice.

Since Stanford is a private institution, it receives no funding from the state. Due to the generous contributions of alumni and a large endowment, Stanford is able to offer a large amount of financial aid. Consequentially, the admissions process at Stanford is need-blind. Once admitted, aid is awarded on the basis of demonstrated need, and a specific financial package is tailored to individual students. Approximately 79% of Stanford's law students receive tuition fellowship or loan assistance, with the average fellowship portion per recipient totaling about \$8,000 annually.

Getting into any law school is difficult, but with its high standards, getting into Stanford provides its own set of hurdles. Stanford Law expects a student to have the drive and the will to succeed not only in school, but also in life. Its students and alumni are certainly testament to that.