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High Point University Promises a Different Kind of Law School

BY MARK P. HENRIQUES

It's hard to ignore former Chief Justice Mark Martin's enthusiasm when he talks about the new High Point University Law School, the Kenneth F. Kahn School of Law, which will open this Fall. The school will start small, with an entering class of about 40-60 students, growing to 100-120 per year over time. The school will occupy a new state-of-the-art building on the High Point campus, which is expected to be completed in the Summer of 2025. It aspires to be a national law school, recruiting students from around the country, which would reflect



the rest of the HPU student body. Nearly 80% of HPU students are from out of state.

HPU's Law School will be different from the other law schools in North Carolina, judging by the faculty hired to date and the approach to instruction. The full-time and extended faculty listed on the school's website (highpoint.edu/law/faculty) includes an impressive list of more than 30 current and former judges from federal and state courts. Martin stresses that this group, who Martin has personally recruited, will help students gain practical skills from experienced judges and

lawyers using the English Inns of Court model, which promotes professionalism, civility, ethics, and legal skills in a collegial setting through education and mentoring.

Personal interactions with experienced jurists are not offered at most law schools, and it highlights HPU Law School's focus on mentorship and learning practical skills. Practical skills are part of the High Point University brand, which is "The Premier Life Skills University." The law school will feature a ratio of

ten or less students per faculty member to foster personal connections. Legal research and writing classes will all be ten students or less in file, creating more opportunities for individual instruction. Students will be invited to observe trials and hearings to learn litigation skills and the real-world application of case law. The school will also guarantee an externship opportunity to every student, which is unusual for law schools.

Access to justice will be another area of fo-



Chief Justice Mark Martin at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new law school.

cus for the law school. The faculty includes Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Nathan Hecht, who has focused on access to justice issues in that state and across the nation. Martin will be personally teaching a course on professional identity formation, which will help students think through their professional journey, which could include BigLaw, small firms, and public service. The coursework will include a focus on civility and professionalism,

consistent with the leadership shown by the Chief Justice's Commission of Professionalism. All students will take a course on access to justice in their first year. The second year includes a mandatory advocacy class, followed by a leadership class in the third year. There will also be a Community Law Clinic and a *pro bono* Veterans Clinic.

The HPU Law School has been a long time coming. Discussions first began in 2008, but the Great Recession and the drop-off in law school admissions put those plans on hold. This decade finally saw action. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the accrediting body for High Point University, approved the university issuing juris doctor degrees. Justice Martin, who had left the North Carolina Supreme Court to serve as dean of the Regent University School of Law in Virginia Beach, was invited to visit High Point. Martin and his wife loved the campus and Martin relished the idea of building something new. He wanted to focus on recruiting exceptional faculty who could bring a new curriculum to life for a relatively small group of engaged students.

Martin is quick to distinguish HPU Law School from the Charlotte School of Law, which operated from 2006 until 2017. Unlike HPU, the Charlotte School of Law was a for-profit school operated by InfiLaw. Profit pressures arguably led to larger class sizes, admission of less qualified students, and low bar passage rates. The American Bar Association put the school on probation in 2016, which led to its closure in 2017.

Martin understands the importance of ABA accreditation and is working closely with Barry Courier, who used to lead the ABA accreditation process. The focus will be on quality students taught by quality faculty, and on proficiency, not profitability. The annual tuition of \$45,000 per year is competitive with other schools, and scholarships and discounts will be available to well-qualified students. High Point University has committed to providing the resources necessary to make the law school successful in the long term.

Martin wants to educate law students in the life skills of effective written and oral communication, critical thinking, active listening, and cultural competence so that they will succeed as client-centered legal professionals in a competitive and rapidly changing world. Martin promises to “ground these skills in the knowledge, values, and mindset of a free society and the marketplace of ideas that is a part of that free society.”

HPU Law School is accepting applications through June 15, 2024, for the Fall 2024 Session through its website or the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). ■

Mark Henriques is a partner in the Charlotte office of Womble Bond Dickinson, where he has practiced for over 32 years. He serves on the Firm Management Committee and chairs the firm's Editorial Board. Mark handles complex commercial and construction litigation, with a focus on class actions. He was an elected State Bar councilor for nine years and now serves as an advisory member.

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