Baylor Law School, Waco, Texas  

[By Douglas May]  
Established in 1857, Baylor Law School is the oldest law school in Texas and the second law school to be founded west of the Mississippi. The law school is affiliated with Baylor University and is located in Waco, Texas.

With a population of more than 120,000, the Central Texas city of Waco is the 26th-largest city in Texas. The city was founded in 1849 on the site of an ancient agricultural village of Waco Indians on the banks of the Brazos River. The city prospered in the 1800s and served as a catalyst for the development of the Chisholm Trail and as a major area for cotton production.

Baylor University moved to Waco from Independence, Texas, in 1887 and remains the largest Baptist university in the world and the largest private university in Texas. Today, Waco is home to Baylor, McLennan Community College, and Texas State Technical College. The city has a revitalized downtown district and is thriving economically. Waco also offers 13 major attractions, five historic homes, seven recreational venues, and nine arts organizations staging theatrical and musical productions as well as art exhibitions. Top attractions include the Cameron Park Zoo, Texas State Hall of Fame, and Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum.

Baylor has a reputation for equipping its graduates to practice law ethically and effectively. This is one of the cornerstones of acquiring an education at Baylor Law School. Students are trained and mentored in all facets of law, including theoretical analysis, practical application, legal writing, advocacy, professional responsibility, and negotiation and counseling skills.

The Princeton Review, the New York-based education services company, praised Baylor Law School’s practical approach to legal education in its 2008 edition of the “Best 170 Law Schools.” In the profile on Baylor Law School, Princeton Review editors describe the school as one that "embraces a practical approach and is thorough in teaching students all the essentials of practicing law."

In the guide a 3L student states, “Other schools teach you about the law and leave it up to the firm to make you a lawyer. But at Baylor you really become one before you have a ‘JD’ at the end of your name."

According to the Princeton Review, "Baylor University [Law School] is very small, very affordable, and very difficult to get into. For students lucky enough to gain admission, Baylor’s unique, ultra-intense, and ‘tough’ Practice Court Program is arguably the best training ground in the nation for practical lawyering."

The Practice Court Program is considered the bedrock of Baylor’s nationally ranked advocacy program. It’s a six-month course required for all third-year students. Procedure, evidence, and advocacy are the essential tools of the trial lawyer, and the Practice Court Program is an “ultra-intensive study of these essentials.” Students are able to try multiple lawsuits from beginning to end, ensuring that upon graduation they’ll be able to “hit the ground running.”

Indeed, the Princeton Review profile on Baylor Law School singled out the Practice Court Program, with one student commenting, “I don’t know how any new lawyer who hasn’t gone through [Practice Court] would ever know where to begin in the courtroom; I feel well prepared to be a trial lawyer.”

Baylor Law School’s mission is to educate men and women by “integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.” It also attempts to enroll exceptionally motivated students who share a strong work ethic and who will enrich the student body and make a unique and distinctive contribution to the legal profession. An outstanding undergraduate grade point average and LSAT score are usually critical to being accepted at Baylor Law School, although the admissions committee also takes into consideration other factors such as letters of recommendation, academic achievements, extracurricular activities, work experience, a strong work ethic, and the “ability to contribute to the diversity of the Baylor community.” The candidate’s ability to communicate clearly and concisely, as shown in his or her personal statement, is also a key factor in possible acceptance to the school.

Student comments describe professors as “drill instructors” who “are not afraid to push students to realize their full potential” but also say that professors are “always willing to help, even with problems outside of their particular classes.” One student says that Baylor Law School “has the finest facilities in Texas — not just for a law school but for any educational institution.”
The Princeton Review's law school guide also lists Baylor law students as the second most competitive in the nation, after those at Brigham Young University. The category is based on "law student assessment of the number of hours they spend studying outside of class each day, the number of hours they think their fellow law students spend studying outside of class each day, the degree of competitiveness among law students at their school, and the average number of hours they sleep each night."

Baylor Law School's interscholastic teams (mock trial, moot court, client counseling, mediation, and trial ethics) are highly successful at state, regional, and national levels, with a mock trial team and moot court team having been crowned national champions in recent years. Baylor's record of success with respect to the Texas bar exam is unsurpassed by that of any other Texas law school. The law school has had the highest pass rate for the bar exam 10 times since 2002, including a 95.83% pass rate for the February 2008 exam and 97.85% pass rate for the July 2007 exam.

The award-winning Sheila and Walter Umphrey Law Center is the home of Baylor Law School. In the building is every facility a modern law school requires. There are spacious and comfortable classrooms, a student lounge and dining area, practice courtrooms, an extensive law library, computer and research labs that provide access to the Internet, and wireless capabilities throughout the building.

Baylor Law School has a record of graduating outstanding lawyers, and its notable alumni include two Texas governors, members and former members of the US Congress and US Senate, two former directors of the FBI, ambassadors, federal judges, justices of the Texas Supreme Court, and members of the Texas Legislature. Leon Jaworski, Watergate special prosecutor and member of the Warren Commission, is one of the more notable alumni.