Golden Gate University School of Law

By Rebecca E. Neely

Founded in 1901, Golden Gate University School of Law, located in San Francisco, California, offers a variety of programs for both new law students and practicing attorneys.

Golden Gate University School of Law is fully accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA) and the Committee of Bar Examiners of the State of California.

Students can earn their J.D., as well as certificates of specialization in Business Law, Criminal Law, Environmental Law, Intellectual Property Law, International Law, Labor and Employment Law, Litigation, Public Interest Law, Real Estate Law, or Taxation Law. In addition, GGU’s School of Law also offers two combined degree programs: JD/MBA with GGU’s Ageno School of Business and JD/PhD with Palo Alto University.

GGU’s School of Law evolved from a movement in the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) at the start of the twentieth century. In 1901, the San Francisco YMCA began the YMCA Evening Law School so people working during the day could attend law school at night. The first evening law school in Northern California was Golden Gate University School of Law, and it also holds the honor of being the region’s third law school. When the YMCA building was destroyed after the earthquake and fire in 1906, classes continued to go on in tents.

Of note, Judith McKelvey was appointed dean in 1973, and as such, was only the second woman in the United States to be named to this position. Frederic White was appointed dean in 2004, and he was the first African-American to be named dean of an ABA-approved law school in California.

As such, Golden Gate University School of Law is known for being progressive, and innovative, and has a history of developing programs that meet the demands of law students, the community, and the legal profession.

The school demonstrated this philosophy, when, in the 1980s, it introduced a graduate legal program in Taxation. In the 1990s, the school developed graduate programs in Environmental Law, International Legal Studies Program, and US Legal Studies.

Other examples of programs the school has launched include the Public Interest Scholars Program, which encourages students to use their legal education to serve their communities, and the Law School’s on-site Women’s Employment Rights Clinic and Environmental Law & Justice Clinic, which provide opportunities for students to work with actual clients who might not otherwise have access to legal counsel.

In 1998, the Law School established the Honors Lawyering Program. Via this program, students take part in two full-time, legal apprenticeships, each a semester in duration.

Golden Gate School of Law provides students with state-of-the-art classrooms. As well, the school recently completed a significant expansion of the Law Library. During the course of the year, the Law School publishes three scholarly journals, holds several major symposiums, lecture series, and other educational programs. Over two dozen law student groups represent a wide variety of professional, political, and cultural perspectives and sponsor educational and social programs during the year. In addition, the School of Law also operates a summer study program on campus, as well as a summer study program in Paris, France.

Several new programs the GGU School of Law recently established include the Intellectual Property Law Center and the Law and Leadership Program, and the Poverty Law Program. In addition, the recently established Chief Justice Ronald M. George Lecture Series will feature annual addresses by state Supreme Court Chief Justices.

According to information at the university’s website, the School of Law’s first priority in all of its programs is to “produce graduates with the skill, judgment, and ethical and moral compass to assume their responsibilities as outstanding members of the legal profession.”