A Century of Ideas and Action

From its first days, the Law School has stood steadfast on the side of greatness. Bold and unique in its conception, it opened itself and its students from the beginning to the currents of the real world and the intellectual fabric of the University. Courageous in its innovative spirit throughout the years, it has welcomed and encouraged novel or disputed ideas that would one day become mainstream thinking. Self-aware and self-critical, it rarely has rested on the status its accomplishments have earned for it.

It's not an overnight process, becoming a great law school. Dean Edward H. Levi, a man for whom the word “great” seems to have been created, said in 1961, “The working out of new ideas is somewhat different from announcing them . . . Ideas in legal education grow very much as does the common law, imperceptibly and over time, utilizing the contributions and experience of many schools and many minds.”

The same holds true for individuals. Often the pursuit of excellence is slow, usually it is difficult, sometimes it's thrilling, sometimes it's all of those, and often it's none. It can be just hard work, frustration, and anxiety. But the opportunity to engage in that pursuit is one to be cherished.

The pages in this section reflect some of the ways in which the Law School, its faculty, students, and alumni have achieved and supported the aspiration so simply described by Walt Whitman: “Produce great Persons, the rest follows.”
1891 University of Chicago founded.
1902 University Senate and John D. Rockefeller agree to William Rainey Harper and Ernst Freund's appeal for a law school at the University. Joseph Beale accepts position as first dean of the Law School. First class enters. 78 students made up the first entering class. They met in the University Press Building (the present-day bookstore). The first faculty had five members: Beale, Freund, Floyd Mechem, Blewett Lee, and Judge Julian Mack. Tuition was $150 per year. The library held 18,000 books. Virtually all instruction was in lecture form. The curriculum consisted of the following offerings:

First Year: Contracts, Torts, Property, Pleading, Criminal Law, Agency, and Persons.
Second and Third Years: Conveyancing, Wills and Future Interests, Corporations, Partnerships, Sales, Bills and Notes, Bankruptcy, Carriers, Equity Pleading, Equity, Trusts, Suretyship and Mortgage, Conflict of Laws, Damages, International Law,

The law and its practice, Harper said, "are the crystallization of ages of human progress. They cannot be understood in their entirety without a clear comprehension of the historical forces of which they are a product, and the social environment with which they are in living contact."

1903 $250 gift from Judge Julian Mack initiates a loan fund for students. 

1904 First Law School building completed. First class graduates. 

James Parker Hall appointed dean. 

1911 Order of the Coif chapter established. 

1914 Moot Court program begins. 

1918 Enrollment declines from 241 in Spring 1917 to 46 in Fall 1918 as a result of World War I. 

1919 First-year class divided into two sections for instruction.

1927 First seminars offered.  
1929 Harry Bigelow appointed dean.  
1932 Practice of using numbers to identify student examination books begins.  
1933 First economics courses at the Law School offered by Aaron Director and Henry Simons.  
1936 First issue of University of Chicago Law Review published. An annual subscription cost $2.00.  
First Law School orientation held. Sessions addressed the general nature of the law, preparing cases, and library use.  
1937 Course of study extended to four years.  
The four-year duration was part of the “New Plan,” aimed at including more non-law subjects in the curriculum. Time was provided in the third and fourth years for individual work on subjects of personal interest. The course of study returned to three years in 1951.  
1938 Legal writing program established.  

War needs affected all aspects of Law School life. Enrollment dropped 68% — to just 64 students — by 1942. Faculty assumed management of the Law Review because of the reduced size of the student body.
1939 “Elements of the Law” added to curriculum. 

1941 University of Chicago Legal Aid Group established.

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1942 LL.M. program introduced. 

1946 Law and Economics program founded.

1947 Harry A. Bigelow Teaching Fellowships established.

1948 First Federal Tax Conference held. 

1948 LSAT created. It is suggested but not required for admission.
The cornerstone was laid in 1958 by Chief Justice of the United States Earl Warren and Lord Kilmuir.

1950 Edward Levi appointed dean.
1951 Sola Mentschikoff becomes first female faculty member.
Placement Office established.
1952 Beecher Hall becomes Law School's residence quarters.
Single rooms cost $116 per quarter, double rooms $200 per quarter, and the meal plan $155 per quarter.
1953 LSAT scores required for application. Chicago Jury Project begins under the direction of Professor Hans Zeisel.
1957 Mandel Legal Aid Clinic opens.
Law School Residence moves to Burton-Judson Courts.
1959 New Law Building (later named in memory of Laird Bell) opens.

"A clinic can focus attention on the difference between actual problems and the problems in the books. Research, law teaching, and lawmaking always must in a sense be theoretical. But it is important that theory or criticism of theory be not far removed from the actual cases which pose the problems."

Chief Justice Earl Warren and Lord Chancellor Kilmuir laid the cornerstone for the new Law School in 1958. The new building, designed by noted architect Eero Saarinen, opened in 1959. Vice-President Richard M. Nixon presided at the dedication, Nelson Rockefeller spoke. The Law Quadrangle was dedicated in memory of Laird Bell in 1966.

1960 Ronald Coase’s article, “The Problem of Social Cost,” published in the Journal of Law and Economics. It introduced the idea that came to be known as the Coase Theorem, for which Professor Coase was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1991.

1962 Phil Neal appointed dean.

1965 The Center for Studies in Criminal Justice is established.

1968 Summer Quarter program abolished.

1969 Edward Levi named president of University.

1969 Law Women’s Caucus is founded.

Phil Neal examines the Pevsner sculpture.

"We are bound to deliver the best, most challenging, and most interesting legal education, even as we produce scholarship and ideas that are both provocative and useful. It is from your Law School that ideas will sprout forth to improve our health care system, to simplify our tax system without sacrificing its good qualities, to see new ways to monitor corporations without compromising their flexibility and competitiveness, and to think of international institutional reforms that balance sovereignty concerns with human rights."

—Saul Levmore, in a message to alumni, 2002
Centennial Events

Fall 2002
Centennial Commemoration
Professor David Currie
October 4, 2002

First Monday Luncheon Chicago
Professor Geoffrey Stone, '71
October 7, 2002

First Monday Breakfast Los Angeles
Professor Geoffrey Stone, '71
October 16, 2002

Library Society
Professor Dennis Hutchinson
October 9, 2002

First Monday Luncheon San Francisco
Professor Geoffrey Stone, '71
October 17, 2002

Schwartz Lecture
Nadine Strossen
President, American Civil Liberties Union
October 23, 2002

North Shore Loop Lunch Evanston
Professor Emily Buss
December 2, 2002

Winter 2003
Supreme Court Swearing-In Ceremony Washington, D.C.
January 27, 2003

Centennial Dinner Washington, D.C.
January 27, 2003

Breckinridge Dinner Chicago
for women graduates and students
February 4, 2003

Katz Lecture and Loop Cocktails Chicago
February 24, 2003

Spring 2003
Coase Lecture
Professor Emeritus Ronald Coase
April 1, 2003

Centennial Dinner New York City
April 3, 2003

Centennial Dinner Los Angeles
April 9, 2003

Dewey Lecture
Amy Gutman
Provost, Princeton University
April 15, 2003

Fulton Lecture
Frank Zimring, '67
Professor, University of California, Berkeley
May 1, 2003

Loop Lunch Chicago
May 2, 2003

Reunion Weekend
May 2-4, 2003

Centennial Gala at the Field Museum
May 3, 2003

Emeritus Luncheon Chicago
June 9, 2003

Continuing
“Chicago's Best Ideas” Discussion Series
Throughout the year, the Law School faculty will present a number of ideas generated by our faculty in the past and present.

Events are held at the Law School unless otherwise indicated. For further information, please contact Debbie Chase Franczek, '72, Director of Alumni Relations, at (773) 834-5435 or dfranczek@law.uchicago.edu.