

HISTORY

The University of Chicago, one of the youngest of the major American universities, was granted its charter in 1890 and opened its doors for classes in October 1892. The generosity of its founding donors, led by John D. Rockefeller, enabled the first president of the University, William Rainey Harper, to realize his bold ideas and extraordinary standards in the creation of a new university. Harper insisted that the new institution must be a true university, with a strong emphasis on advanced training and research, as well as undergraduate education.

The Law School, part of Harper's original plan but delayed in fulfillment until 1902, was a product of an innovative spirit and a devotion to intellectual inquiry. The objective, in the view of Harper and faculty members associated with him in the project, was to create a new kind of law school, professional in its purpose, but with a broader outlook than was then prevalent in the leading American law schools. The aspiration of the new school was set by Harper's conception of legal education in a university setting: education in law "implies a scientific knowledge of law and of legal and juristic methods. These are the crystallization of ages of human progress. They cannot be understood in their entirety without a clear comprehension of the historic forces of which they are the product, and of the social environment with which they are in living contact. A scientific study of law involves the related sciences of history, economics, philosophy-the whole field of man as social being."

This animating philosophy has resulted in the Law School's playing a leading role in legal education since its founding. Chicago was pivotal in almost all of the innovations made in legal education during the last century: the recognition of administrative law, legislation, and comparative law as legitimate fields of law study; the introduction of other disciplines into the law school curriculum and the appointment of faculty outside the law; the extension of the field of legal research from concern with the rules of the law to empirically oriented investigations of the legal system; and the broadening of the curriculum to include clinical as well as academic offerings.

EDUCATIONAL MISSION

Chicago aims to train well-rounded, critical, and socially conscious thinkers and doers. The cornerstones that provide the foundation for Chicago's educational mission are the life of the mind, participatory learning, interdisciplinary inquiry, and an education for generalists.

What sets Chicago apart from other law schools is its unabashed enthusiasm for the life of the mind—the conviction that ideas matter, that they are worth discussing, and that legal education should devote itself to learning for learning's sake.

Learning the law at Chicago therefore is a passionate—even intense—venture between and among faculty and students. It begins in the classroom where students share the stage with the professor. The professor does not lecture, but instead engages the group in a dialogue. Known as the Socratic Method, this dialogue presents students with questions about thorny legal concepts and principles. Energized by this dialogue within the classroom, students seek opportunities outside the classroom for further conversation and learning in one of Chicago's clinical programs, with one of Chicago's three student-edited journals, or in one of Chicago's many extracurricular offerings (there are more than sixty student organizations at the Law School), and in numerous lunchtime events involving speakers or panels.

Honoring Chicago's history and commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry, faculty draw students' attention to insights from the social sciences, the humanities, and the natural sciences beginning on the first day of class. Chicago's unique first year required course, "Elements of the Law," introduces students to the law as an interdisciplinary field and gives students the tools to continue the interdisciplinary inquiry throughout their legal education.

Chicago remains committed to legal education as an education for generalists, although students with particular interests will find it possible to study topics in depth through advanced and more specialized courses. Emphasizing the acquisition of broad and basic knowledge of law, an understanding of the functioning of the legal system, and the development of analytic abilities of the highest order, a Chicago legal education prepares students for any professional role they might choose—legal practice or legal education, entrepreneurial ventures, international private or public law practice, corporate practice, government service, alternative dispute resolution including arbitration and mediation, or work with non-profit organizations. Graduates do many things in their careers, and they all take with them the analytic skills emphasized during their years at the Law School.

