

Spotlight on Tennessee's Law Schools: Exciting Changes at the University of Memphis School of Law

By Rae Oliver

The University of Memphis School of Law is evolving. The profile of the 2007 graduating class is just the first hint of change. This diverse class may be attributed to an adjustment in the way the admissions committee made its selection from the pool of 1,200 applicants. This year's 146 first year students were the product of a more subjective admissions process. The school's admissions committee, like those at some of the nation's highest ranking law schools, took a close look at an applicant's entire file, in addition to the traditional combination of grade point average and LSAT score. The result is a first year class that sports a former pro basketball player, has a 21 percent minority enrollment and has an age range of 21-50 years old.

Two new cracker jack faculty members are also part of the new face of the University of Memphis. These new additions are Lee A. Harris and Thaddeus M. Pope. Harris, a Yale Law School graduate, will focus his teaching on contracts, corporations, law and economics, and social welfare policy. Pope is a Georgetown University Law School graduate and will focus on a long awaited addition to the curriculum – health law, public health law and bioethics. Along with new faculty, the University of Memphis is enjoying the reign of a new leader, Dean James R. Smoot. Smoot also graduated from Yale Law School where he served as executive editor of the *Yale Law School Journal*.

What better way to usher in all of this change than with new facilities. Alum of the U of M may share memories of bar reviews, but they also recall poor classroom acoustics and a library bulging at the seams, not to mention flooding in the student lounge. Future classes will share memories of their own, but those memories likely will be made in a \$42 million facility. Now this doesn't necessarily mean a *new* facility. There is a different and increasingly popular proposal on the table that would move the law school from its current home, sandwiched between university buildings and Central Avenue, to an historic downtown Memphis location – the post office building.

With its close proximity to courts, law firms and government agencies, this option would be more convenient and would afford students an opportunity to mingle with lawyers and judges. Several architectural studies have pronounced this a feasible alternative. Apparently, the post office, with its horizontal line, is conducive to conversion into the large-scale classrooms needed to accommodate a growing enrollment. Bottom line: relocating to the post office gives the law school a prominent position downtown and pulls it into the mainstream of the Memphis legal scene.

So while there are a lot of changes in the works at the University of Memphis School of Law, change is a good thing and if done right, will enhance the reputation of the school and the caliber of its students.

Rae is an assistant U.S. attorney in the office of the U.S. attorney for the western district of Tennessee. She can be reached at rae.oliver@usdoj.gov. For information about TBA activities at the University of Memphis School of Law, contact third year law student Kelly North or 2L student Lauren Hill who serve as the school's liaisons to the YLD. Kelly can be reached at knorth@memphis.edu and Lauren can be reached at lhill3@memphis.edu.