

A Positive Outlook

Vision and Commitment



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The Boyd School of Law opened in 1998, but the path to its creation began nearly three decades earlier with a feasibility study in 1972. No proposal moved forward at the time, and two more feasibility studies would come and go by the mid-1990s, when Nevada and Alaska remained the only states without an accredited law school within their borders.

We had the vision. We needed commitment.

The Nevada Legislature committed \$500,000 in state funding for law school planning in 1995. That same year, soon after being named the new president of UNLV, Carol Harter committed to turning the idea of a law school into reality. At the time, the campaign for a new law school in Southern Nevada had many supporters, but it also faced many obstacles, perhaps none looming larger than securing the funding to both build and sustain the new school.

Then came perhaps the most important commitment of all. William Boyd, then-chief executive officer of Boyd Gaming Corporation, pledged \$5 million to the law school. As a young man, he was forced to leave Nevada to attend law school in Utah, an experience that led to a personal pledge to support a Nevada law school if the opportunity ever arose. That opportunity came in 1996, and his generosity helped attract other private donors and convince then-Governor Bob Miller and the state legislature to commit the necessary funds to create a new law school at UNLV, officially named the William S. Boyd School of Law.

With funding secured, founding Dean Dick Morgan committed to establishing a campus, recruiting a faculty and staff, and matriculating a first class of students in only a year's time. The recently vacated, 1920's-era Paradise Elementary School that sits directly across from UNLV was renovated to serve as the law school's first home. Faculty and staff were recruited from around the country, and 142 students were selected for the inaugural class. The school undoubtedly lost prospective students and faculty because of its temporary location and uncertainty over accreditation. However, those who arrived for class in August 1998 wore the modest facilities as a badge of honor, believing not only in Morgan's vision for what the law school would become, but also in his pledge to community service, which was at the heart of the school's culture and mission from day one.

The Boyd School of Law secured accreditation from the American Bar Association, graduated its first class in 2001 and moved to its permanent home on the UNLV campus after four years in the borrowed elementary school. In the two decades since that first class, the Boyd School has graduated nearly 2,400 students—more than 1,800 of whom remain in Nevada—and the full-time faculty has grown from nine to 47. The school recently jumped to no. 59 in the U.S. News & World Report rankings of accredited law schools in the country, with its legal writing program earning the no. 1 rank in the nation. Boyd is also home to the award-winning Thomas & Mack Legal Clinic. Perhaps even more notable than awards and rankings are the 70,000 people who have been assisted through the school's Community Service Program conducted in concert with the indefatigable Barbara Buckley and her team at Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Legal Services.

The Boyd School of Law graduates who serve our community every day in courthouses, in business, and in government, are proof positive of what this community is capable of. If the school never existed, many students would have gone out of state for their legal educations and, quite often, remained out of state. Others may not have had the opportunity to attend law school at all. With three out of four graduates staying in Nevada, the law school proves our community's ability to identify, educate and retain talented Nevadans.

As we work to get the UNLV school of medicine through those first challenging years; as we seek to rethink how public schools prepare our children for the jobs of the future; as we combat homelessness, food insecurity and school safety; I am frequently inspired by this community's ability to identify solutions and then commit to making them a reality. The Boyd School of Law not only serves as a shining example, but it has also added a number of ready, willing and able soldiers committed to fight for what it truly stands for.

