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## UCI Law Inaugural Class Poised to Gain Repute

EDUCATION: On pace to rival Yale, Stanford on clerkships  
By **JANE YU**

Sunday, December 4, 2011



The University of California, Irvine, School of Law got what it paid for when it started by offering its entire inaugural class full scholarships.

Those free rides are about to merge onto career tracks—and the school's first batch of graduates looks good enough to place the young institution among the nation's top law schools by one key measure: the

number of students who have lined up sought-after clerkships with judges.

The money to pay for the scholarships came from private donors, according to Elizabeth Schroeder, assistant dean of student services.

"That was ... a wonderful way for us to attract top talent," Schroeder said.

The law school accepted 60 students—4% of applicants—for the first class. It was the lowest acceptance rate in the U.S., according to the school.

### Top-20 Comparison

The class was comparable to those of top 20 law schools in terms of median grades and LSAT scores, according to school officials.

Graduation is set for May of next year, and "more than a fifth of the students in our inaugural class have landed prestigious clerkships, nearly all with federal district and federal circuit court judges," spokesperson Rex Bossert said. "By percentage [this] puts our school behind only Yale and Stanford in clerkships."

A report this year by U.S. News & World Report showed Yale University as No. 1, with about 31% of the school's graduates going to judicial clerkships in 2009, the most recent data tracked in the periodic survey.

The report ranks schools by looking at the graduating class of two years prior and sorting the percentages of students who were employed as clerks by federal judges.

Stanford University is second in line with 26%, and Harvard is third with almost 21%.

UCI has 13 of its 58 graduating students—more than 22%—in line for post-graduate clerkships.

Bossert said he expects UCI to be included in U.S. News' rankings in 2015, once the school gains full accreditation.

Future clerks include graduating student Alisa Hartz, who has two consecutive clerkships lined up. The first will be with Judge Dean Pregerson at the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles starting next year. Then she'll work for Judge Stephen Reinhardt in the Los Angeles divisional office of the

 

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UCI graduates are attractive to private firms, too.

“Twenty out of the 58 graduating students received offers from firms,” Schroeder said. “Of those, five received offers for clerkships. Students traditionally accept the clerkship. Firms actually encourage students to do clerkships and come back to the firms.”



**OC Offers**

A number of Orange County firms have tapped the graduating class.

“I received an offer for a position in the OC office of Allen Matkins,” said Denisha McKenzie, who worked as a summer associate at the Los Angeles-based firm last year.

Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis LLP Partner Susan Graham said the firm usually considers only second-year students as summer associates.

“Typically we don’t hire first-years, but UCI was the exception,” Graham said. “We’ve made a commitment to the school. We hired an associate that first summer.”

Allen Matkins was one of the firms that contributed to the scholarship fund for the inaugural class.

Los Angeles-based O’Melveny & Meyers LLP is another law firm whose OC office will be adding a UCI post-graduate next fall.

Outgoing student Jeffrey Wachs interviewed with O’Melveny at an on-campus interview in August 2010 and joined its Newport Beach office this year as a summer associate.

Wachs has accepted a full-time offer from the firm.

O’Melveny also was one of the founding law firms that financially backed the UCI Law School’s launch, said Brett Williamson, partner at the Newport Beach office.

“All of our partners have made that commitment to support the school on an ongoing basis,” he said. “We and a number of other firms also made a commitment that we would go on campus each fall beginning in the second year of the school for the summer associate program.”

The Irvine offices of Los Angeles-based Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, and Washington, D.C.-based Crowell & Moring LLP each will have a UCI graduate next fall.

Law firms typically hire for full-time positions out of a pool of students who have worked with them as summer associates.

**Return to Hiring**

Hiring at regional law firms was not immune to the recent economic downturn.

“In some cases last year, many firms—ours included—were hiring less,” O’Melveny’s Williamson said. “But our hiring targets are back to the pre-downturn level. We are certainly back in the growth mode.”

The firm is no stranger to scouting OC talent, and also looks for prospective hires at Chapman

School’s in Session

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University's School of Law in Orange.

"While UCI certainly did add an element to the availability of high-quality, highly trained candidates, Chapman has provided us with a few of our hires in the years past," Willi-amson said.

UCI Law's inaugural class—and its second and third entering classes, which got scholarships amounting to 50% and 33% of tuition, respectively—should have room to consider clerkships and other jobs with pay scales below the private sector, according to Schroeder.

**Flexibility**

The scholarships will allow UCI Law graduates "greater flexibility in going to public-interest or government jobs, since they are not encumbered by the amount of debt," Schroeder said.

A number of UCI law students still are waiting to hear back from firms.

"It's a little early for public-interest firms to make decisions," Schroeder said. "They hire closer to spring and graduation. Post-graduate fellowship determinations are made between December and March."

**Video**



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