

ORANGE COUNTY

# LAWYER<sup>®</sup>



# WHO'S WHO IN THE OCBA

**PLUS:** Women Litigators Speak Up | Meet Judge Wersching | First-Gen Law Students at Work



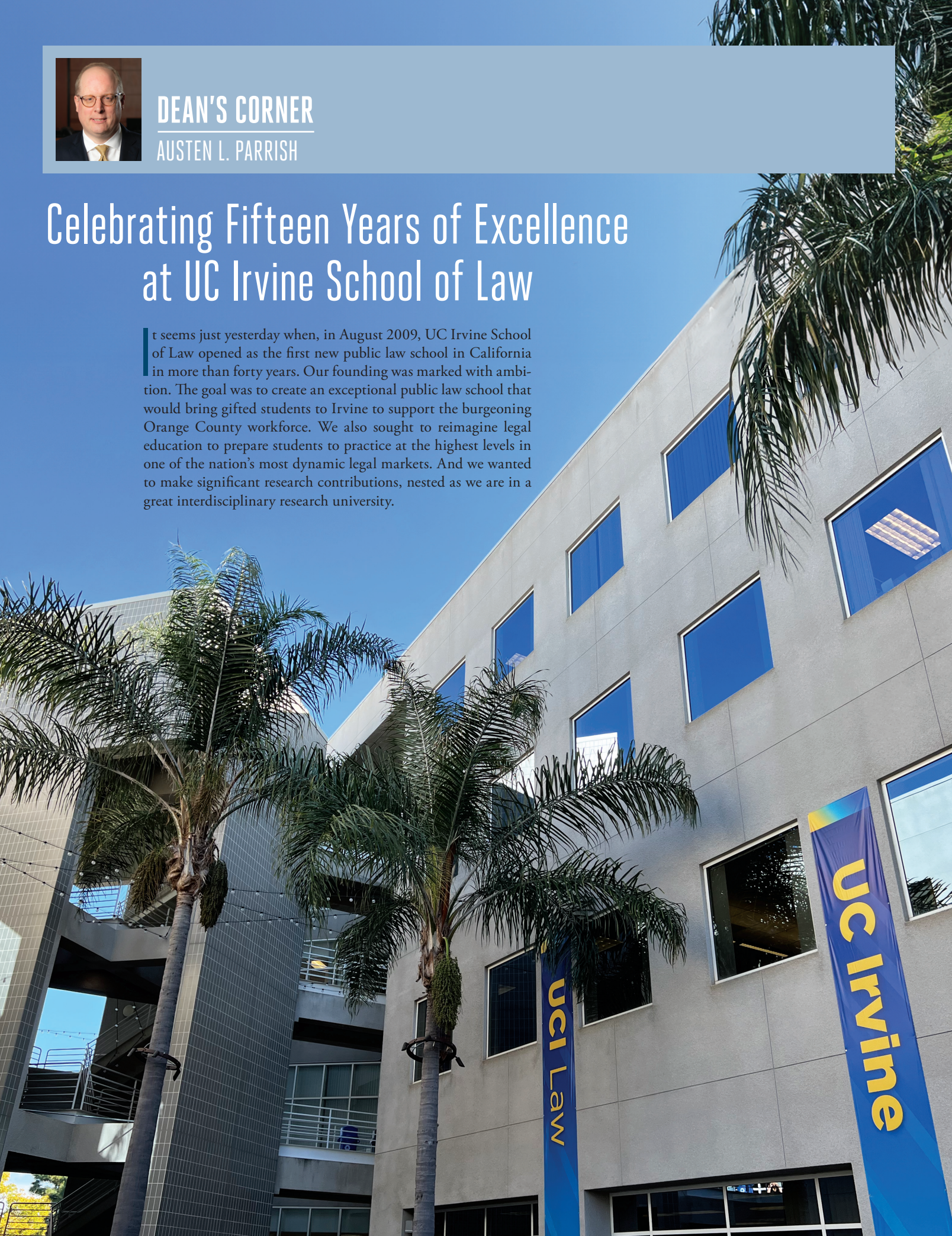


## DEAN'S CORNER

AUSTEN L. PARRISH

# Celebrating Fifteen Years of Excellence at UC Irvine School of Law

It seems just yesterday when, in August 2009, UC Irvine School of Law opened as the first new public law school in California in more than forty years. Our founding was marked with ambition. The goal was to create an exceptional public law school that would bring gifted students to Irvine to support the burgeoning Orange County workforce. We also sought to reimagine legal education to prepare students to practice at the highest levels in one of the nation's most dynamic legal markets. And we wanted to make significant research contributions, nested as we are in a great interdisciplinary research university.





Dedicated faculty and staff—with tremendous support from Orange County leaders—ensured the school met its goals. Yet as audaciously ambitious as plans were, the school defied expectations: no other law school in the U.S. has risen as far and as quickly. Among our plans, we built a large and sophisticated clinical law program (ranked in the top five in the nation) and one of the most admired lawyering skills programs (ranked number nine). We emphasized learning-through-doing, with students interviewing real clients in their first year. The school also developed the Michael G. Ermer Pro Bono Program, where over 100 pro bono projects are offered each semester with community partners, helping meet the needs of low-income and poor people. Our students are ranked third in the nation for the community service hours volunteered each year.

Embedded in our founding DNA was a commitment to making a world-class legal education accessible to all. Each year between 25 to 30% of our entering class are first-generation students, and usually 50 to 60% are students of color, with ages ranging from 20 to 40. With total enrollment of around 500 students, we have a tightknit community. New classes of approximately 160 students come from often 60 to 70 different undergraduate institutions, and typically well over 60% have prior work experience. Our students are smart, humble, and exactly the kind of hard-working future lawyers the profession needs. Grit, passion, and aptitude, not entitlement, are the hallmarks of our grads.

As we celebrate the fifteenth year since our founding, we are not resting on our laurels; we're just getting started. These are some of our recent initiatives.

**We Enhanced Student Support.** We recently expanded our loan repayment assistance program, providing financial support for students with public sector jobs that pay less than \$90,000 per year. In 2023, we were a top-fifteen school for our graduates' high salary-to-debt ratio. And we ranked number twenty-two as a "top go-to" law school for sending a high percentage of graduates to the largest firms, and that's true even though many of our graduates have careers in public interest and government. This year we ranked third among California schools for our 87% July 2023 bar pass rate, higher than peers like UC Berkeley and USC, and just below UCLA and Stanford law

schools. For the July 2022 exam, we tied USC at number three for California schools with an 88% pass rate. That rate was higher than Stanford's (86%), and higher than many well-regarded out-of-state schools (e.g., New York University (87%), Pennsylvania (87%), Yale (81%), Duke (80%), and Columbia (76%)).

**We Hired Rising Stars and Continued on a Path of Excellence.** Our faculty are known for their translative, interdisciplinary research, and hold leadership roles in national organizations. In 2023, six new faculty joined us, with impressive academic and practice experience. Each year, nearly eighty local attorneys teach for us, providing students with broad curricular choices while enabling them to learn from some of Orange County's best


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and brightest. Our faculty are gifted teachers too. In 2023, *Princeton Review* ranked the school second in the nation for the quality of our faculty's instruction in the classroom, and tenth for faculty quality.

**We Invested in Our Research Centers.** The law school's fifteen interdisciplinary centers and institutes serve as focal points to bring together researchers, policy makers, and advocates on some of the most pressing issues of the day. Most recently, we announced that the Korematsu Center for Law and Equality, headed by executive director professor Robert Chang and named after civil rights icon Fred T. Korematsu, will be moving to UCI Law. That's big news not just for the law school, but for Southern California.

**We Celebrated Tremendous Alumni Success.** Alumni are the lifeblood of any good law school. Last year we launched a new UCI on the Road initiative, with alumni networking receptions in Washington, D.C., New York, San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles. In 2023 we learned that, even though our first class graduated only just over a decade ago, more than seventy of our graduates currently serve in board leadership positions in bar associations or on non-profit boards in Southern California.

**Expanded Partnerships.** We host a summer program in New York City and a semester program in Washington, D.C. We recently launched new 3+3 programs—enabling students to complete their BA/BS and JD degrees in six years rather than the usual seven—and scholarship collaborations. And to support our global connections, we signed agreements with prestigious foreign universities. We've been thankful for the tremendous support of Orange County's law firms, and members of the judiciary, government agencies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and local bar associations—including the Orange County Bar Association, the Federal Bar Association, and dozens of affinity bars—that play such a critical role in our students' and the school's success.

And this summary barely scrapes the surface. If you're interested in learning more, follow us on social media. Or be sure to listen to one of our recent podcast episodes interviewing inspiring local leaders (UCI Law Talks). It's been an amazing fifteen years, enhanced by tremendous community support, and we look forward to continuing to forge our path, proud that one of the nation's best public law schools is right here in Orange County. 

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