

Obvious evolution

*Barry Currier '71 shepherds first
U.S. online law school*

The dean of Concord Law School, Barry Currier '71 knows the merits of the nation's first online law school, and he wants to ensure others know them, too.

"We're not trying to undermine the culture of traditional law schools," Currier says. "We're demonstrating that quality legal education can be done online, as well as in the traditional residential environment; you can do it well both ways. Distance learning can be a high-quality, rigorous, deeply challenging learning experience."

Currier began his career in academia at more traditional institutions three years after graduating from USC Law. Following a judicial clerkship in Washington, D.C., practice at Latham & Watkins, and one year as a research assistant to USC Law Professor George Lefcoe, he briefly taught at the University of Kentucky and Duke University schools of law. Currier then joined the University of Florida College of Law, where he taught for nearly 20 years and was named associate dean. He served as dean of the Cumberland School of Law at Samford University in Alabama for four years and then in 2000 began a four-year stint as deputy consultant on legal education for the American Bar Association. Then he was introduced to Concord.

"I was fascinated by the idea of an online law school," Currier says. "You see the way young people use technology and how they learn. Then you factor in how you are using technology in your own work. From there, Concord seems an obvious evolution for legal education."

Although Currier has always considered being a teacher and administrator to be in his make-up, he credits his USC Law experience with inspiring him to pursue a career in legal academia.

"The time that I spent at the law school was so rewarding and stimulating that it just seemed natural to me to want to go into teaching," he says.

After two years as Concord dean, Currier speaks of the school's 1,700 students with pride, noting that 40 percent have graduate degrees and nearly all are balancing some combination of work and family or other time-consuming obligations.



"The commitment of students in the distance learning world, particularly at Concord, exceeds anything I've seen in the rest of higher education," Currier says.

His own commitment is apparent to the entire Concord community, says fellow USC Law graduate Niki Mirtorabi '03, who teaches constitutional law and California community property for the school.

"Barry is a very dynamic leader who's concerned about the students and wants them to get a great education," Mirtorabi says. "At the same time he does whatever he can to facilitate the needs of the professors and the administration, so he really seems to be the glue that binds us all together."

Currently, graduates of Concord, a division of Kaplan, Inc., can only sit for the California bar. Increasing acceptance of Concord by the ABA or state bar admission processes depends on relaying Concord's message to the legal education community and the legal profession, notes Currier.

"What we can do is educate people about what we're doing, get feedback and make changes, and hope to accelerate the approval process," he says. "Distance learning will be a fact of life in legal education and, done well, adds choice and value for students who will be great lawyers."

— Lori Stuenkel