

## **Experts say there's room for state's two new law schools**

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In August, North Carolina will become the home of two new law schools -- the Elon University School of Law in downtown Greensboro and The Charlotte School of Law. As they make final preparations, the question looms: Will there be enough demand for both programs -- located less than a hundred miles apart -- to generate the support they need?

Officials with the two schools and higher education experts say the answer is yes, especially since each school appears to be targeting a different niche of students.

In fact, the dual openings could actually help each of the schools, since it will help create extra buzz around legal education in the state, said Steve Kappler, the executive director of consulting for Stamats, an Iowa-based higher education consulting firm.

"You're going to create interest naturally" with all the talk the law schools are generating, he said.

In the fall of 2004, Elon University announced it would open a law school in downtown Greensboro. The school will begin classes on Aug. 11 with 105 students. Elon, which will only offer a full-time program, expects the school's maximum enrollment to be around 300.

Around the same time as the Elon announcement, a private, for-profit education group named InfiLaw said it would open The Charlotte School of Law. InfiLaw, which also operates law schools in Phoenix and Jacksonville, Fla., is owned by Sterling Capital Partners, a \$300 million private equity fund.

The Charlotte School of Law will originally be located in the city's Midtown section and will begin classes on Aug. 28. While the school is still accepting students, Dean Eugene Clark said he expected the first class to have between 75 and 100 students. The school will offer a full- and part-time program, with day and evening classes. He eventually expects enrollment to reach about 1,000 students, which would make it the state's largest law school.

North Carolina is also home to law schools at Wake Forest University, UNC-Chapel Hill, N.C. Central University, Duke University and Campbell University.

### Plenty of applicants

Despite opening at the same time, officials with both schools say they think there are enough students interested in attending law school in North Carolina that they don't feel they are going to be fighting over the same prospective students.

Clark said when InfiLaw conducted a feasibility study about opening a law school in Charlotte, it found that 14 students applied for every available spot at a North Carolina law school.

Alan Woodlief, associate dean for admissions and administration for Elon's law school, previously served as the associate dean of admissions for Campbell University's law school and saw a similar pattern there. He said many students wanted to attend law school in North Carolina so badly that they applied at each of the state's law schools in hopes of getting accepted at one. Because of the limited spots, many of those applicants ended up going to law school out of state, he said.

"There were good people who ended up going elsewhere," he said.

Elon received more than 500 applications for its first class. On the application, prospective students were asked what other law schools they had applied to, and only a small portion of them listed the Charlotte School of Law, Woodlief said.

The schools will likely not even compete for students already living in the Piedmont, said James Samels, a consultant with Boston-based Education Alliance. Research has shown people, on average, will not commute more than 29 miles to go to class, he said. Given the distance between the schools, it's unlikely those commuter patterns would cross.

### Finding a niche market

But perhaps more importantly than the large pool of potential applicants, officials with the law schools say there is room for both schools to grow and succeed because they have different target markets.

Elon offers only a full-time program, and many of its students are coming straight from undergraduate programs, Woodlief said. The median age for the school's first class is 24.

The Elon law school plans to offer its students some unique experiences by placing a focus on leadership education. The N.C. Business Court will be located on the school's first floor, so students will have the ability to observe trials on a regular basis. The school has also partnered with the American Judicature Society's Institute on Forensic Science and Public Policy, a legal think tank that recently opened in downtown Greensboro.

With its mix of day and evening programs, including the ability to go to school part time, the Charlotte School of Law is seeing an older student body; the average age for its daytime students is 29, and the average age for its evening students is 31, said Clark. Most of the students have also been in the workplace for several years.

The Charlotte School is placing an emphasis on business and finance, sports and entertainment, Clark said, taking advantage of the city's role in the banking industry and its two professional sports teams.

Those different focuses are critical to their success, both as they compete with each other and as they vie for students with the state's other law schools, said Ben Edwards, principal with the Art & Science Group, a higher education consulting firm with an office in Durham.

"Anytime a graduate or professional school gets started, it's important that it have a differentiated mission," he said.

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