



MERCER Lawyer

A PUBLICATION OF MERCER UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

2025 ISSUE

Artificial Intelligence in
the Law School Classroom:

GAMECHANGER OR FAD?

PRESIDENT

WILLIAM D. UNDERWOOD

DEAN

KAREN J. SNEDDON

EDITOR

MARY ANN HOWARD

FACULTY EDITOR

SCOTT TITSHAW

**DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI PROGRAMS
AND ENGAGEMENT**

ANDREA WILLIFORD

DESIGN

GINGER HARPER

PHOTOGRAPHY

MARY ANN HOWARD

MAGGIE REIMER

LARRY SULLIVAN

NAJIVA TIMOTHEE

JAMIE TUCKER

LEAH YETTER

JEANNIE ZIPPERER

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

ELIZABETH CARR

MARY ANN HOWARD

PAT LONGAN

Mercer Lawyer is published for alumni and friends of Mercer University School of Law.

News submissions, including Class Notes, are welcome and should be addressed to the editor at *Mercer Lawyer*, 1021 Georgia Avenue,

Macon, Georgia 31207, or e-mailed to news@law.mercer.edu.

Please send change of address to williford_a@mercer.edu.

STAY CONNECTED!



LAW.MERCER.EDU

MERCER
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF LAW

1021 Georgia Avenue
Macon, Georgia 31207

Contents

FEATURES

8 The AI Balancing Act

AI is finding a seat in the classroom. But what does that mean for students, professors, and the future of legal education?



12 Bringing Practice into the Law School

Judges' presence in a classroom bridges the gap between legal theory and practical application, offering students perspectives not found in textbooks.

16 Alumni Adjuncts

Having alumni in teaching roles provides students with tangible examples of where a Mercer Law degree can lead.

21 150 FOR ALL

The Campaign for Mercer Law

22 Career Services

Connecting alumni with students — how these relationships benefit both groups.

DEPARTMENTS

2 On the Docket

20 Faculty Essay

24 Faculty Profile

26 Student Profile

28 Commencement

30 Faculty News

32 Class Notes

36 Alumni Dinner

From the Dean

DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS,

In 1875, the Georgia General Assembly provided authorization for Mercer Law to award degrees. In May 2025, 141 students from 13 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands earned their Juris Doctor degrees. Of those 141 students, two students earned Juris Doctor/Master of Business Administration degrees, 50 students earned Legal Writing, Research & Drafting Certificates, and 10 students earned the new Public Service Certificates. While the Class of 2025 may have had quite a different experience from the Class of 1875, each student entrusted Mercer University to provide them meaningful learning opportunities that will support a life of purpose serving communities in Middle Georgia, throughout the State of Georgia, across the country, and even around the world.

Our nationally ranked advocacy program and expanded experiential learning opportunities help students see that theory and application are intertwined. One of those learning opportunities received special recognition this year. Our Civics Field Placement received the Liberty Bell Award from the Macon Bar Association. This award is given to a lay person or organization in recognition of the recipient's efforts to promote a better understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. As part of our efforts to expand experiential learning opportunities, we launched a new Prosecutorial Externship. In prior years, students who pursued an externship in a state or federal prosecutors' office participated in the general externship course. Now, students enroll in this specialized externship course where they assist with cases under the joint supervision of a prosecutor and a professor.

The rigor of our legal education program continues to yield strong outcomes. Our first-time bar exam passage rate has risen to 88.4% — our highest since 2012. In the most recent administration of the exam, Mercer Law's first-time pass rate came within just two-tenths of a percentage point of leading all Georgia law schools. Employment outcomes also remain strong, with graduates pursuing careers in private practice, government, and public interest sectors.

Like law schools around the country, Mercer Law is seeing record-high interest in law school. Our Class of 2028 is the highest-credentialed class in Mercer Law history, with a median LSAT of 157 (a two-point increase from the Class of 2027) and a median undergraduate GPA of 3.6. The Class of 2028 includes members from 12 states who attended 57 different undergraduate schools and earned 42 different majors. This Class of 2028 will have the opportunity to take the Georgia Bar exam in February 2028 as Georgia returns to early-bar exam eligibility for qualifying third-year law students. In addition, the Class of 2028 will have the opportunity to take the new NextGen Uniform Bar Exam plus Georgia-specific questions in July 2028.

I know firsthand both Mercer's continuing commitment to a mission focused on practice readiness and Mercer's recognition of the need to adapt. This year is my 20th anniversary at Mercer. When I interviewed at Mercer in 2006, I was displaced by Hurricane Katrina and pregnant with my daughter. I knew as soon as I met individuals from Mercer that this was a special place committed to fostering community. Now, 20 years later, I enter my fifth year as dean. (My daughter is now a sophomore at Mercer University studying computer science and business!) You will see this commitment and recognition in the pages of this issue.

In this issue, you will see our tether to practice that is maintained with members of the bench and bar regularly participating in law school events. That includes the members of our alumni who have become adjunct professors. You will also learn about our work related to the potential uses (and potential misuses!) of generative AI. Whether foundational or innovative, faculty and staff strive to support student learning from law school admission to bar admission. You will learn about those who are new to our community and how their expertise will support students for years to come.

Much has changed since 1875. Throughout all the changes, the constant focus of Mercer Law has been on practice-ready graduates. As practice changes, so too does our curriculum, instructional strategies, and support. What remains the same is our shared commitment to ensuring that Mercer Law students acquire the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to carry forward the tradition of impactful Mercer lawyers.

Best wishes,

KAREN J. SNEDDON

Dean and Professor of Law



LEAH YETTER PHOTO

Underwood Addresses 1L Students for the Last Time as President

Over the course of the last 19 years, Mercer University President William D. Underwood has addressed many of the incoming classes of Mercer Law School students — and this year was no exception.

Speaking to 156 future Mercer lawyers, the best-credentialed class in the School's history, he urged them to uphold the profession's highest standards of professionalism and service.

A lawyer, legal educator, and leader, Underwood took office as Mercer's 18th president on July 1, 2006, and announced last April his intention to return to full-time teaching in fall 2026.

In addition to serving as Mercer's president, he is a tenured member of the Law School faculty. He has placed student learning and teaching at the heart of his leadership. Now, he looks forward to returning to the classroom as the Tommy Malone Distinguished Chair in Trial Advocacy. Welcome to your new office in the Law School, Professor Underwood.



LARRY SULLIVAN PHOTO

Alums and Coaches Help Kick Off 2025-2026 MAC Competition Season



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

During MAC Bootcamp in August, Mercer Advocacy Council 2Ls received guidance and feedback from more than 20 incredible MAC alums and coaches who volunteered their time and expertise, leading the way for an unforgettable competition season.

Welcome Back, Lauren James, '21, Mercer Law's First-Ever Associate Director of Advocacy

This new position will support both the Law School advocacy program and the undergraduate mock trial team.

A proud Mercer Law alumna, James brings courtroom experience, exceptional legal writing and coaching skills, and deep roots in the School's nationally recognized advocacy program.



Veronica Cox, '18, Serving with Purpose as YLD President

Smyrna-based attorney Veronica Cox, '18, stepped into her role as president of the Young Lawyers Division (YLD) of the State Bar of Georgia on July 1 with a clear mission: "Celebrate the YLD." For Cox, it's more than a slogan; it's a call to spotlight the value young lawyers bring to the profession and the power of connection through service and leadership.

A trial attorney at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Atlanta, Cox finds deep fulfillment in advocating for victims of workplace discrimination. "Helping people seek justice feels meaningful every single day," she said.

Her legal journey began at a small civil litigation firm. "I did a bit of everything, but I was always drawn to employment law," she recalled. That interest led her to the EEOC

in 2020, where she now thrives in a role that aligns with her values. Cox's passion for service grew alongside her legal career. She joined the YLD in 2018 and chaired the Legal Food Frenzy Committee from 2019 to 2022. From there, she served as secretary, treasurer, and president-elect before taking the helm.

"The YLD is every young lawyer's introduction to civic engagement in the legal profession," she said. "It's the service arm of the Bar, and it's about giving back — to our members, our profession, and our communities." Cox's presidency highlights three key initiatives: forming the new YLD Multi-Bar Committee to foster collaboration among Georgia's diverse legal organizations, leading the 15th annual Legal Food Frenzy, and celebrating the 20th anniversary of the YLD Leadership Academy.

She's especially attuned to the challenges of an increasingly digital legal world. "Mentorship is harder to come by now," she said. "I believe the YLD can help bridge that gap." Balancing her federal role, YLD leadership, and life at home with a toddler



and a newborn takes dedication and support. "I have an incredible husband, James, and a very supportive boss," she said. "They make it possible."

Cox hopes her term sends a lasting message. "I've been pregnant through two elected terms. If there's one legacy I want to leave, it's this: you can have a family and be a leader."

AWLS Raises \$10,062 for Crisis Line & Safe House

Through a year of creative fundraising, from bake sales and Valentine's Day treats to the 8th Annual Miracle Gala, the Association of Women Law Students raised an impressive \$10,062 to benefit Crisis Line & Safe House of Central Georgia. AWLS extends heartfelt thanks to students, faculty, staff, and alumni for their generosity and support.

Crisis Line & Safe House of Central Georgia is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, along with their children in Central Georgia, serves Bibb, Crawford, Houston, Jones, Monroe, Peach, and Twiggs counties.



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

A Legacy of Law and Storytelling: Remembering Bob Hicks, '51

Robert Edward “Bob” Hicks, ’51, lived a life that blended service, scholarship, and storytelling. Born in Rome, Georgia, in 1926, he grew up in Dublin before joining the Merchant Marines during World War II and later serving as a Navy signalman aboard the USS Kermit Roosevelt in the Pacific. That sense of discipline and duty carried with him throughout his career as one of Georgia’s most respected attorneys.

Hicks returned to Mercer after the war, where he earned both his undergraduate and law degrees. While at Mercer, he met Mary Brooks Popkins, “Brooksie,” whom he married in 1948. He went on to a remarkable legal career that spanned more than six decades, beginning in the Georgia Attorney General’s Office and later at the Atlanta firm

of Gambrell, Harlan, Barwick & White. He even spent two years in New York serving as legal counsel for the chair of Eastern Airlines before returning to Atlanta to help establish Hicks, Maloof & Campbell.

A “lawyer’s lawyer,” Hicks had a reputation for integrity, sharp judgment, and generosity as a mentor. His peers recognized him with leadership roles, including editor-in-chief of the *Mercer Law Review* (1950–51), president of the

Association of Interstate Commerce Commission Practitioners, and president of the Old War Horse Lawyers Club in Atlanta. He was also a member of Atlanta’s Lawyer’s Club, a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, and gave his time generously to community service, notably on the Bioethics Committee of Egleston Children’s Hospital.

Outside the courtroom, Hicks had a wide range of passions: sailing, horseback riding, woodworking, and curating a family retreat at “the Farm” in Lyerly. He was also known for his love of books and his gift for storytelling, a talent that made him a captivating presence among family, friends, and colleagues alike.

Hicks’ devotion to Mercer never wavered. In remembrance of him, and to help ensure future generations of lawyers can benefit from the education that shaped his life and career, donations may be made to the Mercer School of Law Endowed Scholarships Fund, Mercer School of Law, Attn: Jill Kinsella, 1021 Georgia Avenue, Macon, GA 31207. Gifts can also be made online at law.mercer.edu/giving/150-for-all. The Hicks family will be notified of your memorial gift if you wish.



MARY ANN HOWARD PHOTOS

Mercer Law School’s Entering Class of 2028 Stats

- 156 Students in the Class
- 157 Median LSAT (25-75th percentile 155-160)
- 3.62 Median GPA (25-75th percentile 3.30-3.80)
- 48% Female, 52% Male
- 6 Legacies
- 24 Average Age, Range 20 -51
- 57 Colleges and Universities Represented
- 42 Majors Represented
- 12 States Represented

Brown’s Name Added to O’Neal Scholarship

Manley F. Brown, ’65, was a dedicated leader, powerful advocate, and impactful mentor. Brown passed away in December 2024 at the age of 83. His legacy will include the generations of law students he taught during his four decades of service at Mercer Law School, several of whom are now adjunct professors at Mercer Law.

After his passing, it was suggested that Brown’s name be added to the existing H. T. O’Neal, Jr. Scholarship (named in memory of Hank O’Neal, a 1950 graduate of Mercer Law and a longtime law partner and mentor to Brown) as a fitting way to continue honoring the legacies of both Brown and O’Neal. Therefore, the former H. T. O’Neal, Jr. Scholarship has become the H. T. O’Neal, Jr. and Manley F. Brown Scholarship. Brown and O’Neal are remembered and celebrated for their importance in Mercer Law’s 150-year history.

Anyone wishing to contribute to the scholarship may do so online at law.mercer.edu/giving/ways-to-give or by contacting Jill Kinsella at (478) 301-5689 or kinsella_jh@mercerv.edu.



Hank O’Neal, ’50



Manley F. Brown, ’65

Mercer Law Wins 14th Annual Georgia Legal Food Frenzy

For the second consecutive year, Mercer University School of Law earned the Attorney General’s Cup as champion of the 14th annual Georgia Legal Food Frenzy, an eight-day, intrastate law school competition to help support food banks in Georgia. This year, Mercer’s team raised more than \$18,000, topping last year’s efforts by almost 25%. The proceeds from Mercer’s team went to Middle Georgia Community Food Bank (MGCFB) and will provide more than 72,000 meals for hungry families. This is the 10th time Mercer Law has won the title.

Spearheaded by Mercer Law Student Bar Association Community Outreach Chairs Caroline Hager, ’26, and Jack Wareham, ’25, the Mercer Law team raised just short of twice as much as the next highest school, the University of Georgia. Emory School of Law, Georgia State University College of Law, and John Marshall Law School also had teams competing in the student drive. Teams promoted their efforts using LinkedIn videos, gained points by holding volunteer days at their regional food banks, and publicized their achievements on social media.

Mercer Law Dean Karen

J. Sneddon commended the team for its outstanding efforts. “The students exemplify what it means to be a Mercer Lawyer by recognizing a community need, working together to address that need, and inspiring others to follow their example. Their service and leadership are valued. We look forward to continuing to work with the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank throughout the year to support our community.”

Hager said that this year’s success was due in part to support from SBA President Michaela Manley and SBA Vice President Olivia Brillinger. Other students who played key roles include Caroline Cole (top fundraiser),

Kendall Greene, Nawar Khan, Bradley Cusnier, and Bailey Dupré.

Founded in March 1982, MGCFB provides millions of meals through soup kitchens, after-school programs, shelters, senior centers, and other social service organizations. There are more than 140 food pantries affiliated with MGCFB, serving those in need across a 24-county area. For every one dollar donated, MGCFB can supply eight meals to food-insecure neighbors.



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

Mercer Law Welcomes New Faculty

Heather Baxter, Professor of Law

Professor Heather Baxter joined Mercer Law from Nova Southeastern University (NSU), where she served as professor of law and director of Legal Research and Writing. She brings extensive experience in both legal education and constitutional law, with her scholarship focusing on the Sixth Amendment right to counsel, the Fourth Amendment, and innovations in legal pedagogy.



Honorable Janet Stumbo of the Supreme Court of Kentucky and as a trial court staff attorney in Florida's 17th Judicial Circuit. Baxter earned her J.D. *magna cum laude* from Nova Southeastern University, where she was executive editor of the *Nova Law Review*, and holds a B.A. in English from the University of Kentucky.

Sarah Klim, Assistant Professor of Law

Professor Sarah Klim joined Mercer Law School in January as an assistant professor of law, bringing with her a global perspective and a passion for teaching. A Florida native, Klim holds a J.D. from Boston University and an LL.M. in International and European Business Law from Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid, where she graduated with highest honors.

Before law school, Klim taught English in Turkey and Japan — experiences that nurtured her love for teaching and cross-cultural communication. She later practiced commercial litigation at Day Pitney LLP in Miami, Florida, representing corporate clients in complex disputes.

At Mercer, she teaches Legal Writing I and an advanced writing group. Klim said the supportive, close-knit Mercer community and its strong advocacy and writing programs make it an ideal fit.

Outside the classroom, Klim enjoys birding with her husband, playing Dance Dance Revolution, painting Pokémon fan art, and playing chess.



Brian R. Iverson, Assistant Professor of Law

Professor Brian Iverson joined the Mercer Law faculty following a distinguished 17-year career in private practice, where he was an equity partner at Bass, Berry & Sims. Practicing in both Washington, D.C., and Nashville, Tennessee, he specialized in complex civil litigation and became widely recognized for his work in procedural and ethical aspects of civil dispute resolution.



Iverson earned his J.D. *magna cum laude* from Pepperdine University Caruso School of Law and his B.B.A. *cum laude* from Belmont University. His scholarship focuses on civil procedure and professional responsibility. His recent article, "Give Me a Break: Regulating Communications Between Attorneys and Their Witness-Clients During Deposition Recesses," appeared in the *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* and received a *Law360* Distinguished Legal Writing Award from the Burton Awards.

In addition to authoring treatises on patent litigation and financial institution regulation, Iverson has published widely in practitioner-focused publications including *The ACC Docket*, *The New York Law Journal*, and *Law360*. He is a senior fellow of the Litigation Counsel of America and actively participates in several national legal organizations.

Craig Senn, Professor of Law

Professor Craig Senn brings a depth of expertise in employment law, discrimination law, labor law, and contracts to Mercer Law. A native of Atlanta, he has taught law students since 2004 and joined the Mercer faculty after holding the Janet Mary Riley Distinguished Professorship at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law. He also served as a visiting professor at Tulane Law School.

Before entering academia, Senn practiced labor and employment litigation in Atlanta for nearly a decade. He earned his J.D. with honors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he was an articles editor for the *North Carolina Journal of International Law*. He graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Georgia with a degree in philosophy and was named First Honor Graduate.

An accomplished scholar, Senn has published articles in top law journals, including those at UCLA, Florida, Alabama, Iowa, and Fordham.



1Ls Begin Law School with Service and Civic Engagement

As part of orientation in August, all incoming 1Ls participated in a meaningful service learning experience. Students worked alongside local partners — Brookdale Gardens, Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful, and the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank — to support community needs and to foster a spirit of civic engagement. The experience provided insights into challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness and the strides being taken to combat this pressing social issue. This hands-on opportunity reflects Mercer's commitment to servant leadership and the values of justice, empathy, and collaboration.



JEANNIE ZIPPERER PHOTO



LEAH YETTER PHOTO



NAJIVA TIMOTHEE PHOTO

Mercer Law Welcomes Three to Furman Smith Law Library

Since returning to campus in August 2024, Michelle Dewey, now director of Mercer Law School's Furman Smith Law Library, has been working to rethink the library's space and services to meet the needs of an ever-evolving law school community. Part of her work has been to hire new library staff.

Jaelynn Gillis, left, joined the team as circulation manager. She previously served as the library media specialist at Georgia Military College's Warner Robins campus.

Savanna Nolan, middle, joined Mercer Law as associate librarian for administration and public services. She has served in academic law libraries at Georgetown, the University of Baltimore, and the University of Georgia.

Hamaseh Roozbeh, right, comes to us as a reference law librarian and brings a strong academic and professional background to her role. After practicing law in Chicago, Roozbeh discovered her passion for working with law students and pursued a master's in library and information science.

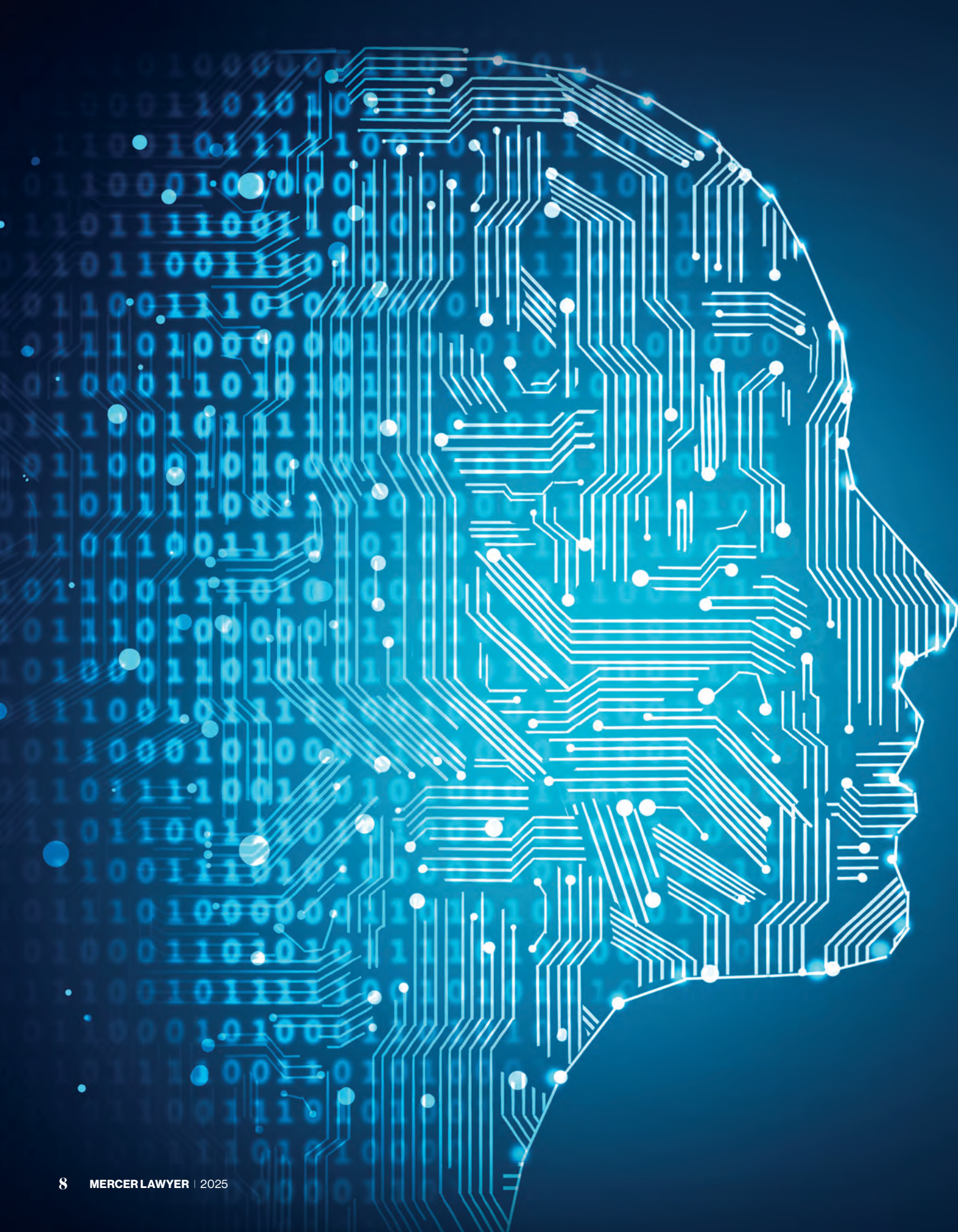


MARY ANN HOWARD PHOTO

Civics Program Honored with Liberty Bell Award

Mercer Law School's Civics Field Placement program received the 2025 Liberty Bell Award from the Macon Bar Association in May. The award is given to a layperson or organization in recognition of the recipient's efforts to promote a better understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, to encourage respect for the law and the courts, to stimulate a deeper sense of individual responsibility so that citizens recognize their duties as well as their rights, to contribute to the effective functioning of our institutions of government, and to foster a better understanding and appreciation for the rule of law.

Under the supervision of Mercer Law professors Suzianne Painter-Thorne and Pam Wilkins, Mercer Law students offer high schoolers specialized and interactive instruction on legal issues, hoping to increase their legal literacy and civic engagement. Among other things, students at the academy learn about the larger legal system and courtroom skills, basic forensic investigative skills such as crime scene analysis, and participate in active mock trial teams. Mercer students also serve as mentors and role models.



AI IN LEGAL EDUCATION

Enhancing the Experience While Retaining the Fundamentals

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant concept on the horizon of the legal profession; it is here, reshaping how lawyers research, draft, advocate, counsel, and communicate. As law schools grapple with how to prepare the next generation of attorneys, three Mercer Law professors — David Hricik, Michelle Hook Dewey, and Steve Johnson — offered candid insights on the promises and pitfalls of AI in legal education. Their perspectives converge on one point: AI will not replace lawyers, but it will change what makes a lawyer indispensable.

For Hricik, who has long studied the intersection of technology and professional responsibility, the stakes are clear. “AI needs to be a focus of our graduates; they need to be able to differentiate their work, and selves, from the output of AI,” he explained.

AI: FRIEND OR FOE?

Hricik sees looming disruption at the entry level. “Everyone I have spoken to sees a drop in demand for the sort of services graduates typically have provided — summarizing documents (depositions), drafting motions and response, and legal research. There is less need for those skills, and some graduates lack the knowledge to assess and evaluate AI output. There will be an odd drop in demand, I have been told, for entry-level associates at larger firms in particular,” he said.

Rather than resisting AI, Hricik believes law schools must lean into the challenge. “New lawyers need to fully integrate AI into their skill set because older lawyers will not necessarily have those proficiencies. We need to embrace AI, ensure our students have it as part of their workflow but also understand its limitations, and teach them soft and other skills that allow them to differentiate their output from that of, for instance, ChatGPT.”

He points to a roadmap that emphasizes not only technological literacy but also the irreplaceable human elements of lawyering — judgment, empathy, advocacy, and ethical responsibility. Courses such as AI and the Future of Law Practice or Human-Centered Lawyering in the Digital Age, he suggests, could help prepare students to collaborate with AI, not compete against it.

Enhancing Learning — Or Short-Circuiting It?

Dewey, director of the law library and associate professor of law, sees both promise and peril in the classroom. “This isn’t a binary question,” she emphasized. “There are so many components of both education and lawyering that can, and do, benefit from the use of AI. That said, when students fail to develop core skills, become over reliant on technologies, and lack basic technological knowledge, serious issues arise.”

Her approach in courses like Introduction to Legal Research and Advanced Legal Research is to expose students to generative AI (GAI) tools while insisting on foundational skills. “Good AI use requires two things: one, strong inputs and two, verified outputs,” Dewey explained. “Without a solid set of basic legal information skills neither is achievable in a comprehensive, effective, and ethical way.”

She acknowledged concerns about academic integrity. “Take-home assignments and exams are going to be ripe with unauthorized GAI use. It’s difficult to stop and even harder to observe. There are ways to ‘AI-

proof’ assignments by asking different questions, but the best approach may be to lean in a bit. I am working to include allowing the use of GAI on my final project but also having students do reflective analysis and independent confirmation research, as one should in practice.”

In Dewey’s view, reflection and assessment are key. “I think having students do work, use AI to repeat the task, and reflect and evaluate is essential. It helps them see firsthand what they need to know themselves, where the AI agents shine, and where the AI tools misstep.”

Her concern, ultimately, is professional readiness. “Lawyers who collaborate with AI to enhance their expertise will gain a competitive advantage. Those who offload their judgment to AI risk becoming interchangeable, as true value comes from human-AI synergy, not substitution.”

Building Competence While Guarding Against Over-Reliance

Johnson echoed similar themes of opportunity and risk. “AI is becoming a central part of the daily practice of law, so students will need to be prepared to use it when they graduate. Consequently, it will need to play an important role in legal education over the next five to 10 years,” he said.

He foresees AI integration across skills-based courses. “Most importantly, legal research, legal writing, trial advocacy, negotiation, drafting, and other skills courses and clinics will need to include some focus on the manner in which AI can and should be used to advance those skills. That is where it will have the most impact in practice.”

Johnson points to platforms like Lexis+ AI, Westlaw Precision, and Westlaw’s CoCounsel as dependable tools for legal research, while noting that general-purpose programs like ChatGPT or Claude can still play a role in brainstorming and summarization, though always with caution. Tools such as Notion AI, he added, may help students organize briefs, outlines, or practice questions.

But Johnson worries about students bypassing the struggle that builds professional judgment. “Effective lawyers must be able to think critically, analyze complex problems, and develop sound legal reasoning to support their conclusions. Over-reliance on AI can reduce students’ abilities to develop those skills. At a more fundamental level, students and lawyers

often find insight after struggling with difficult questions. It is within that anxious and pressure-filled environment that they learn to examine issues from a variety of angles and recall lessons that they have learned in similar situations.” This concern is cross-disciplinary. A June 2025 MIT study showed that overuse of AI does create significant reductions in cognitive function related to creativity ideation, memory load, and semantic processing.

To preserve that growth, Johnson advocates structured assessments that balance AI’s role. “Faculty can require students, as part of assessments, to document the manner in which they created the required assessment output; i.e., show their work. If they used AI, explain how they used it and why, and how they verified the data produced by AI. Faculty can also give students assignments where students review AI-generated output and identify errors in the output and suggest improvements,” he said.

In skills-based courses, he suggests, in-person simulations — client counseling, negotiations, trial practice — remain invaluable, ensuring that the human dimensions of lawyering are never eclipsed by automation.

Preparing Students for a Changing Market

The professors differ in emphasis but converge on one essential truth: the legal marketplace is changing rapidly. Tasks once delegated to junior associates — document review, basic drafting, and routine research — are now being handled more efficiently by machines. As Dewey put it, “Client relationships and the human elements of lawyering will be more sought-after skills. I also think the marketplace will demand a certain level of tech savviness for lawyers, but that doesn’t mean everyone needs to be a technologist.”

Hricik is blunter: “We need to embrace AI, ensure our students have it as part of their workflow but also understand its limitations.”

Johnson sees AI as a double-edged sword. While some routine positions may disappear, he believes AI can also create opportunities. “The time savings should enable lawyers to spend more time on tasks that AI cannot effectively carry out, such as interacting with clients, training new attorneys, taking on additional clients, or establishing a



“If law schools want to prepare students for modern practice, then legal education must study the practical and ethical considerations of AI in the legal field.” — MICHELLE HOOK DEWEY

better work/life balance with the saved time, and developing expertise in new areas of law.”

The Role of Law Schools

So what does all this mean for law schools charged with preparing practice-ready graduates? The answer, according to these professors, is not to silo AI into a single elective but to integrate it across the curriculum while doubling down on fundamentals.

For Dewey, that means embedding AI literacy into courses students already take. “For most students, it won’t be necessary to take an AI in the Law class,” she said. “What I

hope to see is an acknowledgement across the curriculum that AI needs to be addressed in almost all facets of study from writing to research to understanding data security when using GAI tools.”

Johnson points to faculty training as another essential piece. “One of the biggest challenges law schools will face in incorporating AI into the curriculum will be faculty training,” he observed.

And Hricik returns to the larger purpose of legal education: helping students distinguish themselves in an era where machines can draft a contract or brief in seconds. “We must shift beyond traditional legal education to focus on both irreplaceable human skills and tech fluency,” he emphasized.

A Human Future in a Digital Age

As the legal profession undergoes rapid transformation, Mercer Law professors see both challenge and opportunity. AI is not a passing trend but a permanent fixture of practice. The task for law schools, and for the profession more broadly, is to ensure that the next generation of lawyers enters the field both fluent in the technology and confident in the uniquely human skills that no algorithm can replace.

As Dewey put it, “Lawyers who use AI to supplement and strengthen their work will have an edge. Lawyers who simply rely on AI tools will find themselves infinitely replaceable.”

For alumni, judges, and practitioners, the message is clear: AI is changing lawyering, but it does not change the core mission of lawyers — serving clients, advancing justice, and applying wisdom where technology cannot. ■



From the Bench to the Classroom

HOW JUDGES ENHANCE LEGAL EDUCATION

In a profession where experience is often the best teacher, the presence of judges in law school classrooms offers something students can't get from textbooks alone: wisdom from the bench. Whether they visit for a guest lecture, mentor student advocates, or serve as adjunct professors, judges bring critical perspective, credibility, and human connection to the theory-heavy world of legal education.

At Mercer Law School, the bridge between the classroom and courtroom is alive and well thanks to a long-standing tradition of engagement from alumni and sitting judges. From trial court veterans to appellate leaders, these jurists contribute not only their time but also their lived experiences, mentoring students through stories, examples, and practical guidance. Their message is clear: the law is a noble profession, and its next generation must be both prepared and inspired.

Several judges trace their teaching motivation to a deep sense of gratitude for what Mercer Law gave them and a desire to return the favor. For Judge Eric Dunaway, '96, of the Atlanta Judicial Circuit, giving back is both personal and aspirational. "I am very grateful for the opportunity, education, and experiences Mercer provided," he said. "I feel a sense of duty to the Law School to volunteer and give where I can. I am a Mercer lawyer and proudly hang my diploma on my wall."

Judge Lamar W. Sizemore, Jr., '74, who has taught as an adjunct professor for 37 years, echoed a similar sentiment. Inspired by his own mentors and by the State Bar's professionalism goals, he began teaching in 1981 and never looked back. "Mercer University, and especially the Law School, is a part of my family heritage," he said, noting that five generations of his family have earned 15 Mercer degrees. "I viewed my time as a Superior Court judge as a service to my profession and to our community."

Chief Superior Court Judge Philip T. Raymond III, '79, of the Macon Judicial Circuit also sees his classroom presence as a way of honoring those who guided him. "As a law student I was advised to seek out an older, experienced lawyer who would be willing to mentor me and advise me when faced with unfamiliar or difficult issues. Throughout my career I had many who were willing to fill that role, and their advice was invaluable. Having been the beneficiary of this advice and guidance I feel an obligation to make myself available to be a source of advice for law students and young lawyers, be it in the classroom setting or on an individual basis."

The desire to serve the legal community motivates many judges to return to the classroom.



"Being in the classroom is a chance to discuss with students the impact they will have on society."

THE HONORABLE SHONDEANA CREWS MORRIS, '97

Chief Judge, DeKalb County Superior Court



"There is no magic formula for success other than hard work and good people."

THE HONORABLE DAVID L. MINCEY III, '03

Superior Court Judge, Macon Judicial Circuit

Senior Judge John Carbo, '79, of the State Courts of Georgia sees it as a natural extension of a judicial career rooted in public service. "I feel it is my contribution to make the profession be the best it can be," he said.

While judges may be asked to speak about procedure, rulings, or courtroom dynamics, their lessons often reach deeper. They model how to carry oneself as a lawyer; how to uphold professionalism, deal ethically with clients, and handle the weight of a career in service to others.

Chief Judge Shondeana Crews Morris, '97, of the DeKalb County Superior Court believes that judges in the classroom serve as living examples of professionalism. "It's important for judges to engage law students directly to share our wisdom through mentorship opportunities and to give them an honest view of the kinds of ethics, civility, and professionalism they will be expected to adhere to as future lawyers," she said.

She doesn't leave that message to chance. During her visits, she often reads students the Lawyer's Creed and uses her platform to emphasize the importance of equity and justice. "Law students who understand the importance of professionalism and civility while still in school will carry those lessons forward into their legal careers."

Judge David L. Mincey III, '03, Superior Court Judge in the Macon Judicial Circuit, underscored a related theme: that students must understand the gravity of their future roles. "Understand the nature of what lawyers do and that your job/your file is someone else's life," he tells students. "Be honest. Be truthful. Be helpful. Be courteous and respectful."

Raymond emphasizes that professionalism must be paired with responsibility. "I want students to understand that the practice of law can be extremely rewarding but that it comes with great responsibility. The outcome of every case they handle will have an impact on their client, either good or bad, and they have the obligation to put the preparation and effort necessary to properly present every case they handle," he said.

He also reminds students of their duty to serve the broader community. "As a member of the legal profession, they have an obligation to give a certain amount of their time back in the form of *pro bono*



"I get the satisfaction of seeing my alma mater produce practice-ready lawyers."

THE HONORABLE JOHN C. CARBO, '79
Senior Judge, State Courts of Georgia



"It's an opportunity to share my experiences, so students can learn from my mistakes as well as my successes."

THE HONORABLE PHILIP T. RAYMOND III, '79
Chief Superior Court Judge, Macon Judicial Circuit

representation of clients who do not have the financial means to hire lawyers," he said.

The presence of judges in law schools is more than ceremonial, it often leads to mentorships that shape careers. When judges open up about their own professional journeys, they demystify the path and give students much-needed confidence.

Mincey, for example, openly shares that his path to the bench wasn't scripted or strategically planned. "I was minding my own business one day, and my friend called and said I should submit an application for the upcoming vacancy," he said. More calls followed. "These were successful friends and mentors who had guided me in prior years and continue to do so today."

He now pays that mentorship forward. "I believe it is incumbent upon judges to get in front of students and to help them understand the voyage from law student, to law clerk, to young associate, to senior associate, to partner, and so on," he said.

Morris reinforces that she is available to students long after her lecture ends. "Judges are not living in a tower somewhere; I can be reached out to and am available to them to serve as a mentor."

For some students, those interactions can be transformative. "There's a possibility that one of them is of the belief that they've made the wrong decision by going to law school," said Dunaway. "So I want to reassure them that if I and my classmates made it, so can they."

Raymond, who practiced law for more than three decades before joining the bench, notes that his mentorship has a practical side. "Many of the students I speak with, and students at other law schools just like them, will be lawyers practicing in my courtroom in the not too distant future. Interacting with them at this stage of their education provides an opportunity to share my experiences, so they hopefully can learn from my mistakes as well as my successes. Helping them gives me the satisfaction that I am following in the footsteps of those who helped me throughout my legal career," he said.

Judges bring the courtroom into the classroom, grounding theory in reality. Students may spend years studying contracts, torts, and civil procedure, but few have the chance to observe how those

doctrines play out before a judge until they enter practice.

Carbo notes that his long history of mock trial coaching helped students shed fear and build courtroom instincts. "The students can observe my thought processes in the trial setting, which can carry over to their careers as practitioners," he said. "It helps law students think and react in the same manner as they will as attorneys."

Sizemore agrees and sees tremendous value in exposing students to courtroom culture before they're sworn in. "Students do not have many opportunities to participate in courtroom activities and should take every opportunity to interact with judges in social as well as professional settings."

He also sees his role as one of myth-busting. "I enjoy the opportunity to interact with students, hopefully teaching them the law but also dispelling some incorrect notions that they may have about the courtroom," he said. When he visits 1L Professionalism classes, he often shares practical insights about how lawyers should conduct themselves in court, lessons often overlooked in doctrinal courses.

Raymond shared a similar motivation: "Despite everything I learned in law school about the law, I knew very little about the actual practice of law and all of the different opportunities available to one with a law degree. I think it is important to give students the opportunity to hear from someone who has been practicing law to help understand the application of what they are learning to real-world circumstances."

He also noted the importance of tailoring advice to students' varied experiences. "Some come from families with a history of lawyers and a fairly well-developed idea of what they would like to do after law school. Others are first-generation law students who may not even be aware of all of the opportunities available to a law school graduate, whether in the field of law or otherwise. Only by speaking with students directly and answering their specific questions, and asking questions of them, can I develop an answer or advice that is tailored to their specific query, rather than give a generalized answer which may be of little real assistance," he said.

For all the judges interviewed, the time



"I believe that judges can be most impactful off the bench."

THE HONORABLE ERIC K. DUNAWAY, '96
Superior Court Judge, Fulton County



"My hope is that law students will have a better appreciation of the relationship between lawyers and judges."

THE HONORABLE LAMAR W. SIZEMORE, JR., '74
Former Superior Court Judge, Macon Judicial Circuit, 2001–2010; Currently "Of Counsel" with Clark, Smith & Sizemore, LLC in Macon

they spend in the classroom isn't just about dispensing knowledge — it's about rekindling their own belief in the law and inspiring the next generation to treat it as a calling, not just a career.

"I am reinvigorated by the opportunity to engage with law students," said Mincey. "I am reminded of the fascination and awesomeness of the law and the legal practice and proceedings."

Morris expressed similar sentiments. "Being in the classroom with future lawyers fills me with hope for our noble profession," he said.

Dunaway added that students' enthusiasm is contagious. "It helps me to remember why I wanted to be a lawyer."

Raymond agreed, noting that the exchange is mutual. "Helping them gives me the satisfaction that I am following in the footsteps of those who helped me throughout my legal career," he said.

These visits also prompt judges to reflect on their own professional values. Sizemore closes many of his talks with three principles he hopes every student will carry forward: "Remember that first you were a lawyer, never forgetting the trials and tribulations of law practice; when in doubt, err on the side of mercy; and just rule!"

Whether through guest lectures, long-term mentoring, or adjunct teaching roles, judges build lasting connections with students — connections that carry over into practice and shape the culture of the legal profession. Mercer Law's tradition of engaging judges in its classrooms shows students that the bench isn't a distant institution; it's a part of the profession they are about to join.

As Carbo put it simply, "I get the satisfaction of seeing my alma mater produce practice-ready lawyers."

From preparing students for the courtroom to helping them see the broader purpose of their legal education, judges are uniquely positioned to shape the next generation of lawyers. Their presence in the classroom reminds students that the law is not just something to be learned — but something to be lived, practiced, and passed on.

Judges in the Classroom: Two Valued Perspectives

The presence of judges in the classroom serves a purpose far beyond guest lecturing. For Professors Bonnie Carlson and Pat Longan, inviting judges to speak to students is a vital part of shaping ethical, practice-ready lawyers.

"In the clinic setting, it's important for students to have the opportunity to hear straight from a judge," said Carlson, director of experiential education and associate professor of law. She times the visit strategically — after students have taken on their first clients but before they appear in court — so their questions are grounded in real experience.

Longan, William Augustus Bootle Chair in Professionalism and Ethics, takes a similar approach in his professionalism course. "Students read about professionalism, but they need more than books to gain a deep understanding of what professionalism means and why they should aspire to live up to the high ideals of the legal profession," he said. "What the students need are exemplars, people who embody and live out those values. Judges are especially helpful in this regard."

Both professors agree that judges offer a credibility that law faculty cannot. "Only people who have done that work can convey what it feels like to discharge such responsibility," Longan said. "As law professors, we can talk about it. Judges live it. The students know the difference." Carlson added, "They get to hear strategies from the most credible and compelling source there is. When the judge says it, it just means more."

The lessons students take away are lasting. "I hope students learn that judges are human beings and that these interactions lessen some of the intimidation of going to court," said Carlson.

"I also hope they learn about the high expectations that judges have for them when they become attorneys," Longan said, "and are inspired to live up to those expectations." ■

ALUMNI ADJUNCTS

Teaching What They Practice
to the Next Generation of Lawyers



MARY ANN HOWARD PHOTO

Adjunct professors who balance active law practice with teaching play a unique and vital role in shaping Mercer Law students. Attorneys like Bert Hummel, '12, D'Andrea Morning-McCants, '07, and Virginia C. Josey, '16, bring the realities of the courtroom and boardroom into the classroom, bridging theory with practice. These professors, and many others, see teaching as a way to give back — sharing their passion for the law while sharpening their own skills. For students, their courses provide mentorship, real-world insight, and career readiness; for the professors, the classroom is equally rewarding, energizing, and deeply meaningful.

HUMMEL: PASSING THE TORCH

For Bert Hummel, '12, balancing a thriving law practice with teaching future lawyers isn't a burden, it's a privilege. As owner and founder of Hummel Trial Law in Kennesaw, Hummel represents clients whose lives have been disrupted by negligence, from car wrecks and tractor trailer crashes to workplace injuries and wrongful death.

As the sole attorney, he juggles every role, "advocate, litigator, marketer, accountant and occasional IT department," he says, supported by a dedicated paralegal and legal assistant.

Three years ago, Hummel added another title to his resume: adjunct professor at Mercer Law, where he teaches Case Settlement Negotiations. The course is both timely and practical. "Most cases resolve outside the courtroom, and negotiations are constant throughout the litigation of a case," Hummel explains. "In fact, the NextGen Bar Exam will test legal negotiation skills."

For Hummel, the classroom is more than just a place to teach tactics and styles of negotiation. It is an extension of his professional values.

"Teaching lets me pass on the same kind of mentorship I received as a young lawyer and keep the 'chain of teaching' alive," he says. "It's my way of ensuring that the next generation enters the profession not just with skills but with a sense of responsibility to their clients, their colleagues, and the larger community."

That balance of practical skills and professional ethos is central to



MARY ANN HOWARD PHOTO

"My students dive head first into negotiations, put in extra hours, and challenge me to push the material further. Their drive has been inspiring, and it leaves me excited about the future generation of Mercer lawyers." — BERT HUMMEL

Hummel's approach. He uses mock mediations, role playing, and even "war stories" to make lessons memorable, while inviting alumni from different practice areas to share their experiences. "Every part of the course is a reflection of real practice," he says. "The students love it, and the alumni love giving back to the law school. It's a win-win that connects the classroom to the profession."

The impact flows both ways. Hummel finds inspiration in his students' drive and adaptability. "When I was a 3L, I was focused on grades and job offers," he recalled. "My students dive head first into negotiations, put in extra hours, and challenge me to push the material further. Their drive has been inspiring, and it leaves me excited about the future generation of Mercer lawyers."

That adaptability also reflects a larger shift. "I think there is a clear demarcation of pre-COVID pandemic and post-COVID pandemic," Hummel observes. "Today's students roll with it, which makes balancing a law practice and teaching possible. They adapt, and in doing so, they remind me that good lawyers have to be flexible and adaptable too."

Beyond the classroom, Hummel remains deeply engaged with Mercer through the Alumni Board of Directors, state bar service, and mentoring. His students have his personal number and know they can reach out for guidance long after the semester ends.

For Hummel, teaching is both a responsibility and a joy. "The practice of law is not a business, it is a profession," he emphasizes. His advice to alumni considering adjunct teaching is simple: "Do it ... it's one of the most meaningful ways to give back. Plus, it keeps you connected to what the next generation of lawyers value, and that's a pretty good compass for where our profession is headed."

MORNING-MCCANTS: A FULL-CIRCLE PERSPECTIVE

For D'Andrea Morning-McCants, '07, serving as an adjunct professor at Mercer Law School is more than an academic pursuit, it's a return to her roots and an opportunity to shape the next generation of lawyers. Morning-McCants, who serves as vice president, chief compliance and privacy officer, and in-house legal counsel for Grady Health System, brings her extensive professional experience directly into the classroom.



"Serving as an adjunct professor is my way of giving back, investing in the next generation of legal professionals, and sharing the real-world challenges and rewards of compliance and health care law." — D'ANDREA MORNING-MCCANTS

In her current role, she oversees compliance and ethics for one of the largest public academic health care systems in the country, addressing regulatory, governance, and legal matters that impact everything from an academic medical center to Georgia's largest nursing home. With such high-level responsibilities, her decision to step into the classroom reflects both a personal passion and a professional commitment.

"This is my first year teaching as an adjunct professor at Mercer Law School," she says. "As an alumnae of Mercer Law School, I always look for ways to support the school and students. Serving as an adjunct professor is my way of giving back, investing in the next generation of legal professionals, and sharing the real-world challenges and rewards of compliance and health care law."

Morning-McCants teaches Healthcare Compliance, a course that blends law, policy, ethics, and risk management with real-world applications. Her students don't just learn theory, they see how regulations play out in high-stakes, complex environments. "As a working practitioner, I hope students take away real-world insight on how laws and regulations are applied in practice, not just theory," she explains. "My goal is for my students to be career ready by further developing their critical thinking skills, applied knowledge, practical judgment, and professional confidence."

The benefits flow both ways. For Morning-McCants, the classroom is a place of renewal. "Personally, it's a full-circle moment. I grew up in a family of educators, including both my parents, so I think teaching is in my blood. Professionally, I've always

found myself drawn to the training and education part of my job and often sought out opportunities to speak on panels at educational conferences. Teaching as an adjunct professor allows me to pair my love of training and education with exposing the future generation of lawyers to the exciting practice area of health care law."

She has been pleasantly surprised by how her students engage with the material. "I've been impressed by their curiosity and eagerness to

connect the material shared each week with real-world applications. Their questions often push me to think differently about familiar issues that I deal with every day."

Beyond the classroom, she prioritizes mentorship, arriving early or staying late to meet with students and extending conversations through Zoom or one-on-one meetings. "My approach to mentoring is to be accessible and approachable," she says.

For Morning-McCants, adjunct teaching is as rewarding for the professor as it is valuable for the students. Her advice to fellow alumni and legal professionals is simple, "Stop thinking about it and just do it! It's worth the time commitment. Teaching is both rewarding and reinvigorating. You'll sharpen your own thinking and practice skills, build meaningful relationships with students and law school staff, and make a lasting impact on the profession."

JOSEY: SHARING PASSION AND PRACTICE

For Virginia C. Josey, '16, stepping back into the Mercer Law School classroom is more than a professional commitment, it is a calling. A practicing litigator and dedicated teacher, Josey began teaching Advanced Litigation Drafting in January 2023 and has taught several semesters since.

"Advanced Litigation Drafting was my favorite practical course as a student," she says. "I enjoy detailing the opportunities provided by litigators to strengthen their arguments through style and hard work."

Her passion for litigation and her dedication to her students illustrate the unique value that adjunct professors bring to legal education. They carry the lessons of real-world practice directly into the classroom, ensuring that students graduate not only with knowledge of the law but also with the skills to apply it effectively.



"With hard work and dedication to success, litigation drafting can be remarkably rewarding for you and your clients. It is critical to not only find a legal field you enjoy but focus daily on crafting your skills for your clients." — VIRGINIA C. JOSEY

Her teaching style reflects her own learning experiences as a student who worked constantly while in law school. "For students, I include real-world anecdotes to help connect my lectures with their practical application," she explains. One of her most popular classes is a mediation simulation. "Since our class is structured from my prior cases, these examples are not merely hypotheticals. This appears to be the most enjoyable class for students. I think it is enjoyed because it gives a glimpse of real-world experience to the classroom, as well as highlighting how artful communication can be significant."

Josey believes Mercer students distinguish themselves with their intentional communication and advocacy skills, and she works to reinforce those strengths. Her advice to alumni or professionals considering adjunct teaching is clear: "Remember what drives your dedication to the legal profession and communicate how you do your best work. Be the teacher you would have enjoyed and respected." ■

For Josey, teaching is also a reminder of her broader responsibilities as a lawyer. "Teaching is a consistent reminder of my duty to give back professionally," she explains. "I love practicing law. It is a privilege to strengthen my litigation skills to help others face large corporations. At this stage of my career, I have the opportunity to share my love for litigating with students. When I enter the classroom, I never lose sight of this responsibility."

Her course emphasizes more than mechanics. Josey wants her students to carry with them lessons that will serve them throughout their careers. "With hard work and dedication to success, litigation drafting can be remarkably rewarding for you and your clients," she says. "It is critical to not only find a legal field you enjoy but focus daily on crafting your skills for your clients."

Students benefit not only from the practical skills Josey teaches, but also from her mentoring outside the classroom. She welcomes conversations in her office and enjoys guiding students through career decisions. "I encourage my students to reach out if they need help, and I enjoy when I can be helpful," she says.

Beyond Books and Briefs

How Mercer Law Leads the Way in
Shaping Lawyers’ Professional Identities

By Pat Longan, William Augustus Bootle Chair in Professionalism and Ethics

Law students spend much time and energy learning fundamental principles of law and acquiring basic skills. But there is more than that to becoming a good lawyer. A former Yale Law School dean once wrote, “a practicing lawyer not only possesses a set of distinctive skills but is likely to be a particular sort of person as well.” To help students become that “particular sort of person,” all ABA-accredited law schools now must provide substantial opportunities for their students to cultivate “professional identities” that include the values, guiding principles, and well-being practices that are foundational to success.

The ABA adopted its professional identity requirement in 2022. Most law schools have had to undertake new efforts to comply with it. Not Mercer: We’ve been teaching professional identity since 2004 in a required first-year course, The Legal Profession.

In our course, the students learn that lawyers need to cultivate six virtues: competence, fidelity to clients, fidelity to law, public spiritedness, civility, and practical wisdom. They first read a book I wrote with my Mercer colleagues, Daisy Floyd and Tim Floyd, about the formation of professional identity. The students then engage in weekly small-group discussions about how the six virtues play out in practice. Those discussions culminate with our “practical wisdom exercises,” in which the students must explain how they would handle complex ethical dilemmas in which the virtues are in tension with each other.

The students also write weekly reflections. The early assignments require the students to think deeply about their values and how those values align with the work they hope to do. Later, the students respond to questions about issues confronting the profession, including access to justice and implicit bias. The students also write reflections on the practical wisdom exercises they do late in the semester.

The students need more than books and classes if they are to cultivate their professional identities in the right way. They need to hear directly from people who have internalized the values of the profession and flourished. In our “Inside the Legal Profession” series, I interview a diverse array of lawyers and judges about their careers. Our 2025 lineup included a Georgia Supreme Court justice, two Superior Court judges, a former federal prosecutor, a public defender, a captain in the U.S. Air Force JAG Corps, two associates

at large Atlanta law firms, and the deputy director of Georgia Legal Services, among others. Many students report that this is their favorite part of the course.

The final assignment is to write a reflection on the experience. This year, one student wrote, “This class helped me move from a vague idea of what it means to be a lawyer to a much clearer, more personal vision. It gave me space to reflect, listen, question, and grow. I’m walking away with not just a stronger sense of my professional identity but with motivation and excitement for the kind of lawyer, and person, I want to be.” That’s what the Legal Profession course is all about. ■



MARY ANN HOWARD PHOTO

150 FOR ALL

The Campaign for Mercer Law

The 150 for All campaign is an opportunity for the entire Mercer Law community to help prepare the next generation of practice-ready lawyers. Join us as we aspire to greater heights. Together we will offer the Mercer Law experience to a new generation of young legal professionals. **We will continue to inspire the best in students, faculty, staff, and alumni; and we will continue to share our time, knowledge, and resources with communities close to home and around the world.**



At the Heart of Our Vision Lie Three Pivotal Goals



Access for All

Help us ensure that talented individuals have a pathway to law school. We seek to expand our community outreach and pathway programs. We also seek to increase the number of available scholarships and to expand our student support with funds for summer stipends, bar study awards, and student emergency funds.



Success for All

At Mercer Law, we don’t want students to just survive law school. We want them to thrive. Help us extend experiential learning activities that include litigation-based and transactional-based opportunities. Financial support enables us to expand the curriculum to reflect technological advancement and the demands of practice.



Facilities for All

The historic building on Coleman Hill is a wonderful place to study and learn. Help us respect and update the space to foster collaborative learning. We will be renovating our law school library, classrooms, and study rooms to ensure that students can gather, work together, and learn from each other.

**Your Gift
Makes a
Difference**



Merit- and Need-Based Scholarships | Student Emergency Funds
Leadership Experience | Community Engagement | Experiential Learning
Up-to-Date Technology | Adaptable Classrooms | Bar Study Awards
Mentorships | Modern Library | Updated Study Rooms | Summer Stipends

From Student to Supporter

Full-Circle Journey of Alumni Partnership in Law School

By Elizabeth Carr, '10, Assistant Dean of Career Services

For many law students, graduation feels like crossing the finish line. Years of rigorous study, hours of preparation, and countless late nights culminate in that moment of walking across the stage to be hooded by your faculty and to collect your diploma from the dean. Yet, in truth, law school is less of an ending and more of a launching pad. The ways alumni engage with their alma mater after graduation can shape not only their own careers but also the journeys of those who come after them.

This is the essence of the full-circle journey — moving from student to supporter, transforming the Law School experience for future generations. At the heart of this cycle lies alumni involvement with Career Services. When alumni lean into partnerships with Career Services, student organizations, and broader student affairs programming, they don't just "give back." They create connections to practice areas, professional insights, and mentorship opportunities that students might not otherwise access.

That is one of the most amazing things about the Mercer Law network. Our alumni are incredibly generous when it comes to partnering with Career Services to offer their time and advice. These personal connections not only help students polish a resume or land a job but often open doors to new practice areas, opportunities, and ways of thinking they might never encounter otherwise. Alumni involvement isn't just helpful. At Mercer, it's part of what it means to "Be the Bear."

Law school is often described as the foundation of a legal career. It's where students learn the mechanics of the law, sharpen their reasoning, and begin building the skills they'll need as attorneys. But the classroom doesn't always answer the deeper questions students ask themselves: "Where do I fit in? What kind of lawyer do I want to be?"

That's where Career Services steps in. We provide guidance, structure, and programming to help students explore their options. When alumni are part of that process, the impact is even stronger. Alumni have walked the same hallways, wrestled with the same choices, and know how to translate theory into reality.

Mentorship is one of the clearest examples of this. Alumni mentors don't just advise students on resumes and interviews. They talk about navigating

"There's a special moment when you, the student, become you, the alumnus. You survived law school, took the bar exam, and started practicing. You officially know how to make it as a lawyer, and students want to know how you did it. Even now, as I celebrate 17 years as an alumnus, every time I'm asked for advice by students, a part of me thinks someone who's been practicing for a while should probably answer this, not me. Oh yeah, I have been practicing for a while. I'm not even a young lawyer anymore."

It's a treasured moment for a Mercer Law alum. We are a family. You heard that a lot as a student and experienced it when alumni came to spend time with you. We get to see the newest generation and hopefully make their journey a little easier — with encouragement, a bit of wisdom, or maybe a sponsored lunch or dinner. I remember thinking how cool it was that alumni would bend over backwards to meet Mercer Law students. Now I'm one of them, and I remember so many students I've seen over the years. I've talked with them, encouraged them, and watched them move into the practice of law with pride, knowing I got to see them come up."

BRYAN O. BABCOCK, '08



workplace culture, balancing professional obligations with personal life, and managing the stress that comes with high-stakes work. They're often the ones who can say what students might not: that imposter syndrome is real, that the bar exam can feel overwhelming, and that setbacks don't define your career. By sharing their own stories, alumni normalize those struggles and show students how to move through them.

Alumni also open students' eyes to the many ways a J.D. can be used. Many begin law school with only a few practice areas in mind, but alumni involvement expands those horizons.

The impact shows in the stories we hear. A student who had never considered bankruptcy law attends an alumni-led seminar, applies for an externship at that alum's firm, and later secures her first full-time job there. Another student shadows a solo practitioner alum, sees firsthand the rewards and challenges of running a practice, and eventually gains the confidence to open their own firm.

These stories aren't rare at Mercer Law, they happen again and again. What makes them meaningful is how they come full circle. Alumni remember what it was like to be in those shoes, searching for that first summer job, questioning whether they'd chosen the right practice area, or walking into their first client meeting. The support they now provide is the same support they once needed, and that continuity is what makes alumni involvement in Career Services so powerful.

When those alumni return to engage with

students by hiring interns, speaking on panels, or mentoring, they complete the full-circle journey. Career Services plays an important role in that process by connecting alumni and students at the right time and in the right way. These moments aren't just acts of generosity — they build a culture of support

as an abstract idea but as a living, breathing network of people invested in their success.

For the Law School, this partnership strengthens the entire community. Alumni remain engaged, students thrive, and the profession benefits from graduates who are better prepared and better connected. It's a ripple effect that extends far beyond campus.

Most importantly, it reminds students they are not alone. Law school is challenging, but alumni involvement ensures that every student has someone who understands their journey and can help guide the way forward.

The story of law school doesn't end at graduation; it grows into something much larger. Law school is, indeed, just the beginning. By partnering with Career Services, alumni help shape the next generation of lawyers in ways that are lasting, meaningful, and transformative.

To alumni reading this: your story matters. Your experience can open doors, change minds, and spark passions. Whether you mentor, hire, or simply share your

journey, you have the power to transform the student experience.

To students: remember that the people who once sat in your seats are ready to walk alongside you. And when you become tomorrow's alumni, the cycle will continue — ensuring that the law remains not only a profession but a community, sustained by the simple yet powerful act of paying it forward, which lies at the very heart of Mercer Law. ■



The Career Services team, from left: Administrative Support Associate Julie Barnes, Assistant Dean Elizabeth Carr, and Assistant Director Jessica Herndon

This partnership strengthens the entire community. Alumni remain engaged, students thrive, and the profession benefits from graduates who are better prepared and better connected. It's a ripple effect that extends far beyond campus.

that sustains the Law School community. Each conversation, externship, or networking event ripples outward, shaping not only individual careers but the character of the profession as a whole.

The outcomes of alumni involvement are profound. Students who engage with alumni often report feeling more confident, more prepared, and more motivated to pursue their goals. They begin to see the profession not

Margie Alsbrook

DISCOVERING HER CALLING: HOW ALSBROOK'S JOURNEY LED TO MERCER LAW

When Margie Alsbrook graduated from Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas, with a bachelor's degree in history, she began her career as a business reporter covering food and agriculture — industries central to the region and essential to everyday life. Her reporting sparked an awareness of the sweeping influence of food and agriculture law. Later, she transitioned into corporate public relations for a publicly held company, where frequent collaboration with the legal department planted the seeds of a new career direction.

Though becoming a lawyer had not been part of her original plan, friends often encouraged her to consider law school. Eventually, their suggestion resonated.

"There was a moment in my corporate job when I was running an errand and the car in front of me had a bumper sticker that said, 'Due to budget cuts, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off,'" Alsbrook recalled. "The company where I was working was having some troubles, and I could tell layoffs were coming. But it was not until that moment that I realized how unhappy I had become in that job. I went back to the office and gave my boss four weeks' notice, and pretty soon after that I signed up to take the LSAT."

Still, she said it was not until her first semester of law school was

underway that she fully grasped her calling. "I don't think I really knew what a great fit it was for me until I was already actively engaged in the study of law," she said.

Alsbrook earned her J.D. in 2005 from the University of Arkansas School of Law, where she distinguished herself as a member of the *Arkansas Law Review*, served as national student director of the ABA's Client Counseling Championships, and co-founded the groundbreaking *Journal of Food Law & Policy*. By its first publication, the journal had paid subscribers on six continents, and a special printing of the *United States Food Law Update*, co-authored by Alsbrook and Michael T. Roberts, was delivered to every member of Congress.

"We worked hard to create 'evergreen' policies that would set the journal up for success for years to come. This was vital because law journals have 100% leadership turnover every year, so the structure has to be solid for a journal to succeed. I am very proud that we just celebrated our 20th anniversary this year."

She went on to earn her LL.M. in agriculture and food law after a year of intensive study, supported by her work as a graduate assistant at the National Agricultural Law Center. Her research focused on food safety and labeling issues.

For nearly two decades before entering academia, Alsbrook practiced law and developed a thriving boutique practice serving small business clients while also engaging in food and agricultural policy work. Her areas of expertise included the nuanced field of genetically modified (GM) and genetically engineered (GE) organism law, regulations that govern biotechnology while balancing human health, environmental safety, and ethical concerns. She also contributed as a freelance legal writer and researcher for several law firms.

With a successful practice in motion, what ultimately drew her to the classroom?



Margie, right, and her mother Valerie Alsbrook enjoyed riding horses on the beach at Amelia Island, where Margie served on nine panels during the Southeastern Association of Law Schools Conference in August.

"Helping students grow in their understanding of the law and change their approach to legal skills over the course of a semester ... it's truly an honor."

"People had been telling me for a long time I would be a good law professor," Alsbrook said. "But it was not until I accepted the job as a visiting professor at the University of Arkansas that I realized how much I loved this role. It was like a part of my heart that I did not know was there cracked open, and I truly found my purpose. I loved teaching so much I could not imagine not doing it."

The realization prompted a major life change. Determined to continue teaching, Alsbrook moved across the country to a town she had barely heard of, where she did not know a single person, to join Mercer Law. "That was one of the best decisions I have ever made," she said.

At Mercer, Alsbrook teaches courses including Civil Lawsuits, Agricultural Law Seminar, Legal Writing I and II, and Introduction to the Study of Law. Her aim, she says, is to prepare students with strong written and verbal communication skills and instill confidence in their ability to advocate for clients.

"Helping students grow in their understanding of the law and change their approach to legal skills over the course of a semester and seeing them continue to increase skills during their time at Mercer Law

... it's truly an honor. Mercer Law students are amazing, and working with them is the best part of the job."

Beyond the classroom, Alsbrook partners with Professor Pat Longan, Dean Karen Sneddon, and a team of practitioners and judges led by alumna Kate Cook, '02, to formalize Mercer Law's partnership with the *Journal of Southern Legal History*. She also serves as faculty advisor to Phi Delta Phi and the Rural Law Students Association and is a board member for Middle Georgia Justice.

Her favorite part of the Mercer Law community, she says, is the genuine kindness that permeates the campus. "Everyone takes what we do seriously, but we are all here to help the students as much as possible, and that keeps us focused on kindness and pragmatic productivity. It's a great community and a great learning environment."

Now settled in Middle Georgia, Alsbrook has embraced her new home. "I love to travel so one of my favorite things about this area is being so close to a large airport. I also love to volunteer, attend Mercer music concerts and community events, and visit with friends. When I have quiet time I love to read for fun and to do needle arts such as embroidery or cross stitching." ■

Kennedy Wright

A CALLING TO JUSTICE: ONE STUDENT’S JOURNEY
TO BECOMING A CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATE



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

When George Floyd was murdered in May 2020, the world stood still, and for Kennedy Wright, ’26, it was the moment everything changed.

“That moment awakened something in me. I couldn’t stand by and do nothing in the face of such blatant injustice,” said Wright. “I wanted to be a voice for those who often feel unheard and to challenge the systems that perpetuate inequality.”

That voice — clear, driven, and full of conviction — is now finding its place in the legal profession, where Wright is preparing to practice civil rights law. Her journey, shaped by personal experiences and a deep sense of justice, is a powerful example of how purpose can be born from pain.

At Presbyterian College, Wright’s activism took early root. A finalist for the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, she also helped draft the college’s first anti-racism policy, now part of the official student handbook. She served as student body president and led the Multicultural Student Union, an experience she credits with deepening her understanding of advocacy and the power of policy.

Her service continued with AmeriCorps, working at a day shelter for unhoused young adults. “That year taught me that as a lawyer, compassion and empathy must guide every interaction. I realized the only thing separating any of us from homelessness could be one lost job or one missed paycheck.”

That human-centered philosophy continues in her work with the Georgia Legal Services Program, where she supports low-income clients through housing instability and legal challenges. “When someone is in crisis, they’re in survival mode. You have to address the immediate need before you can help build long-term solutions.”

Ask Wright what it means to be a civil rights advocate today and her answer is immediate: courage.

“Being an advocate is having the courage to stand up for what is right, even when it is uncomfortable or unpopular,” she said. “It’s about holding systems and institutions accountable, especially when they fail the communities they claim to serve.”

On campus, Wright serves as vice president of the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) and as a Barbri representative, ensuring students have the support they need to prepare for the bar exam.

“Mercer’s commitment to ethics, service, and practical training align with the kind of lawyer I want to be: one who serves people.”

She’s also participating in the Civics Field Placement program and completing an independent study on police practices — projects that reflect her commitment to civil rights and justice reform.

Law school isn’t easy, but Wright says she’s made it through with help from a strong support system — friends, faculty, and family who encouraged her every step of the way.

“I found a tight-knit group of friends who formed a study group where we held each other accountable and made sure no one was left behind,” she said. BLSA also played a major role. “They made sure that first-year students knew we had a village behind us.”

When things got overwhelming, she leaned on her family and her partner, Joshua, for support. One of her most impactful academic influences has been Associate Dean and Professor Pam Wilkins. “After just one class, I remember thinking, ‘I’m going to take every course this professor offers,’” Wright said. “Her passion for teaching is matched only by her genuine investment in her students.”

Wright’s future is clear: she plans to practice civil rights law in the South, specifically Georgia or her home state, South Carolina. “This region holds deep personal meaning for me. I’ve lived, served, and studied here, and I’ve seen firsthand the unique challenges Black and underserved communities face,” she said.

She sees herself as part of a new generation of Southern advocates, those who are reimagining justice not just through the courts but through education, trust-building, and community presence.

“I didn’t come to law school just to earn a degree; I came to make a difference,” Wright said. “Mercer’s commitment to ethics, service, and practical training align with the kind of lawyer I want to be: one who serves people.”

Her vision includes advocating for victims of police violence, pushing for transparency in law enforcement, and dismantling systemic racism in the criminal

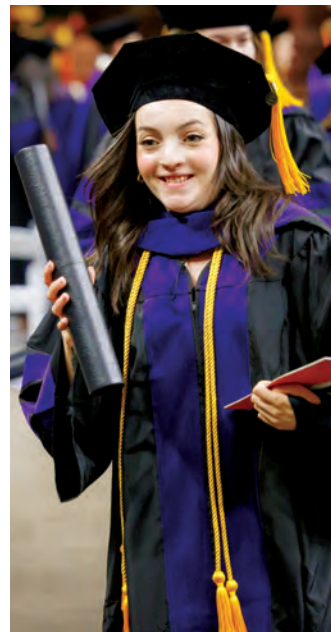
justice system. But her mission goes beyond litigation. She wants to empower communities and restore trust in a legal system that has too often failed them.

“Passion is powerful,” she said. “But purpose is built moment by moment, relationship by relationship. You don’t need to have everything figured out to make an impact.”

To others on their own path toward justice, Wright offers this advice: “Don’t shrink yourself. Your lived experiences, your voice matters. The world doesn’t just need more professionals. It needs more people who lead with heart, with integrity, and with the courage to challenge injustice head-on.

“Be bold. Be relentless. And remember — every step you take toward justice, no matter how small, is part of a legacy far bigger than you.” ■

Commencement



Saturday,
May 9

141

*Juris Doctor
Graduates*

50

*Legal Writing,
Research
and Drafting
Certificates*

12

*Certificates in
Public Service*

2

JD/MBA

45

*Honors
Graduates*

13

*States Represented
Plus Puerto
Rico and the
Virgin Islands*

**Vernon
Strickland, '06**
Speaker

**Chyna
Annastasia
Carter**
*George Waldo
Woodruff Award of
Excellence*

Jim Fleissner
*Reynold J. Kosek,
Jr. Excellence in
Teaching Award*



MAGGIE REIMER AND LEAH VETTER PHOTOS



Professors Daisy and Tim Floyd Retire

After more than two decades of dedicated service, Professors Daisy Floyd and Tim Floyd taught their final classes at Mercer Law in May, leaving an indelible mark on the School's commitment to experiential learning and professional identity.

Daisy served as dean of the Law School from 2004 to 2010 and again from 2014 to 2017. She was named University Professor of Law and Ethical Formation in 2010, continuing her leadership in shaping Mercer's distinctive emphasis on law and ethics.

Tim became Mercer's Tommy Malone Distinguished Chair in Trial Advocacy in 2014. Until 2023, he directed the experiential education program that he built into a robust network of clinics and externships. In recognition of his national impact, the Association of American Law Schools Clinical Section honored him with the William Pincus Award for extraordinary and lasting contributions to clinical legal education.

Effective July 1, Tim holds the title of professor emeritus and Daisy the title of dean emerita. Both were also finalists for Mercer University's prestigious Joe and Jean Hendricks Excellence in Teaching Award in consecutive years, Daisy in 2024 and Tim in 2025.

Generations of Mercer lawyers have been shaped by their teaching, mentorship, and vision. The Mercer Law community celebrates their legacy and wishes them every happiness in retirement.



Professors Byars and Simson Honored with Faculty Awards

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2024 Judge Clyde Reese Board of Visitors' Awards for Excellence. Professor Kaleb Byars, left, is the recipient of the Judge Clyde Reese Board of Visitors' Award for Excellence in Scholarship. Professor Gary Simson, right, is the recipient of the Judge Clyde Reese Board of Visitors' Award for Excellence in Teaching.



Professor Fleissner Honored

Professor Jim Fleissner was honored with the prestigious Reynold J. Kosek, Jr. Excellence in Teaching Award during May's commencement, a recognition voted on by the graduating class. Beloved for his dedication, insight, and impact in the classroom, Fleissner continues to leave a lasting impression on Mercer Law students.



Professors Represent Mercer Law at Conferences

Many Mercer Law faculty give presentations and serve on panels across the nation and around the world. During the summer, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor of Law Pam Wilkins, Assistant Professor of Law Margie Alsbrook, and Professor of Law Heather Baxter presented at the Biennial Conference of the Association of Legal Writing Directors in Phoenix, Arizona.

Mercer Law School is proud to have such brilliant representation leading the way in legal writing and scholarship.

Faculty Accomplishments 2024-2025

Margie Alsbrook

Strong Democracies Need Reliable Citations, 57 ARIZONA STATE LAW J. 1 (2025).

Untangling Unreliable Citations, 37 GEORGETOWN J. OF LEGAL ETHICS 415 (2024).

"Ethical Considerations for Law Review Editors," National Conference for Law Review Editors (2025).

Board of Directors of Scribes, The American Society of Legal Writers.

Kaleb Byars

Recidivist Organizational Offenders and the Organizational Sentencing Guidelines, 66 BOSTON COLLEGE L. REV. 745 (2025).

A Concrete Standard of Judicial Review for Corporate Deferred Prosecution Agreements, 78 FLORIDA L. REV. ____ (forthcoming 2026).

Bonnie Carlson

Originalism as Anti-Woman: An Examination of Dobbs and Bruen, MICH. STATE L. REV. ____ (forthcoming 2025).

Rahimi and the Future of (the Rest of) the Protection Order Prohibition, 78 SMU L. REV. 433 (2025).

Timothy Floyd

American Association of Law Schools (AALS) William Pincus Award for extraordinary and lasting contributions to clinical legal education.

David Hricik

AGNOR'S GEORGIA EVIDENCE (2024-25 ed.)

GEORGIA LAW OF TORTS (2024-25 ed.)

MASTERING CIVIL PROCEDURE (2025).

REMEDIES: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH (2025).

Meagan Hurley

Rivers v. Guerrero, 52 ABA Preview, No. 6 (March 2025).

Using Big Data to Dismantle Systemic Barriers: How Tracking Official Misconduct Can Foster Justice and Increase Accountability in the Legal System, 38 GEORGETOWN J. OF LEGAL ETHICS ____ (forthcoming 2025).

The Dangers of Denying Prosecutorial Independence: Wrongful Convictions, Official Misconduct, and Public Corruption, 55 STETSON L. REV. ____ (forthcoming 2026).

Ishaq Kundawala

Super-Efficient Breach in Bankruptcy: Recalibrating Remedies for Contract Rejection Damages, 42 EMORY BANKER. DEV. J. ____ (forthcoming 2026).

Anne Johnson

Preparing Students for Legal Research on the NextGen UBE Bar Exam, 117 LAW LIBRARY JOURNAL, 388 (2025).

Stephen Johnson

Ordinary Meaning, Extraordinary Tools: Dictionaries, Corpora and Generative AI, 58 TEX. TECH. L. REV. ____ (forthcoming 2026).

President, Center for Computer Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI).

Gary Simson

Our Partisan Supreme Court and an Essential First Step Toward Reclaiming What's Been Lost, 41 JOURNAL OF LAW & POLITICS ____ (Fall 2025).

The President's Orders Targeting Law Firms as Unconstitutional Bills of Attainder — Darning Lessons from the Past, Verdict (May 15, 2025).

Karen J. Sneddon

Raising the Bar: The NextGen Bar Exam and Contract Drafting (co-authored with Susan Chesler), 25 TRANSACTIONS: THE TENN. J. OF BUS. LAW 843 (2024).

Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) Assessment Committee (2025-26).

Panelist: "The Advisory Board: Purpose, Goals, Utilization, Engagement, Expectation, & Pipeline," 2025 ABA Law School Development Conference, New York, NY (July 18, 2025).

Scott Titshaw

Comparative Sexual Orientation Law: Data for a Developing Discipline Symposium presentation at the Grotius Centre for International Legal Studies, The Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands (June 2025).

Pamela Wilkins

Premises Liability and Third-Party Attacks: A Path Forward, 76 MERCER L. REV. 85 (2024).



Mercer Law was proudly represented at the 2025 SEALS Annual Conference, contributing insights and expertise across multiple sessions by participating in panels and discussion groups focused on legal pedagogy. The group helped advance conversations around effective teaching strategies and provided fellow legal educators with valuable tools to enhance classroom learning. From left, **Professors Meagan Hurley, Ishaq Kundawala, and Dean Karen Sneddon**. Not shown **Professors Kaleb Byars, Sarah Klim, and Margie Alsbrook**.

Share your personal and professional news at news@law.mercer.edu.
 Class Notes are reported from October 2024 through July 2025.

Class of 1972

The Honorable Jack O. Partain III was recognized by the Florida Bar for being a member in good standing for 50 years and was appointed to the Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution by the Supreme Court of Georgia.

David F. Sipple was selected for The Best Lawyers in America 2025. Sipple practices admiralty and maritime law at HunterMaclean in Savannah.

Class of 1975

The Florida Bar recognized the following alumni for being members in good standing for 50 years: **Peter R. Corbin**, **Ted E. Day, Jr.**, **John F. Dickinson**, **Kenneth A. Jones**, **Charles A. Sorenson**, and **Stephen E. Tanner**.

Class of 1976

Gerald Davidson, Jr., will continue to serve in the Post 4 seat from the Gwinnett Circuit on the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Georgia.

Randall A. Jordan was selected for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America 2025. Jordan practices railroad law with HunterMaclean in St. Simons.

Class of 1981

Therese S. Barnes was reappointed as the executive clerk for the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Class of 1986

Philip D. Irwin has joined Stites & Harbison, PLLC as a partner in the Nashville, Tennessee, office. Irwin will be a member of the Business Litigation Service Group.

Class of 1987

The Honorable R. Keith Kelly was reelected in February by the South Carolina General Assembly to a third term on the Circuit Court of South Carolina.

Class of 1989

Lisa Carlton was appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis to the State of Florida's 12th Judicial Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission.

Deborah Denise Tillman was appointed as the district court judge in Mobile County by Alabama Governor Kay Ivey. Tillman previously served as a state, federal, and military prosecutor and was an adjunct professor at the University of South Alabama teaching criminal law, contracts, and civil procedure.

Class of 1990

Chief Justice Michael P. Boggs has joined HunterMaclean as a partner. Boggs will concentrate on advising clients across a broad range of legal matters, including complex litigation, government-related issues, and strategic policy changes.

J. Jeffrey Deery was named an Orlando Lawyer of the Year in banking and finance litigation. Deery also was selected for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America in commercial litigation and banking and finance litigation.

Class of 1993

Kelly Shea Crites has launched a new law firm serving clients in the Potomac Highlands and throughout West Virginia. The Law Office of Kelly S. Crites, PLLC provides legal counsel and representation for family law matters, estate planning and trusts, and business and real estate law. Crites previously served as a family court judge in West Virginia.

Class of 1994

Troy W. Marsh was reelected to the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Georgia. Marsh will continue to serve in the Ogeechee Judicial Circuit, Post 2 seat on the board, representing Bulloch, Effingham, Jenkins, and Screven counties.

Frank Turner was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

Class of 1995

Matthew Lepore has been appointed as executive vice president, general counsel, secretary and chief compliance officer at Air Products. Lepore will operate from the company's global headquarters in Allentown, Pennsylvania, reporting directly to the chief executive officer.

Class of 1996

Joey H. Cowart was reappointed to the Prosecuting Attorneys Qualifications Commission by Speaker Jon Burns. Cowart served as the Bulloch County solicitor general for 16 years and currently operates his law practice.

Christian E. Hardigree was recently selected as a Fulbright Scholar for the Fulbright International Administrative Educators (IAE) program in France. Hardigree has been regional chancellor at the University of Southern Florida in St. Petersburg since May of 2022.

Jim Manley was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

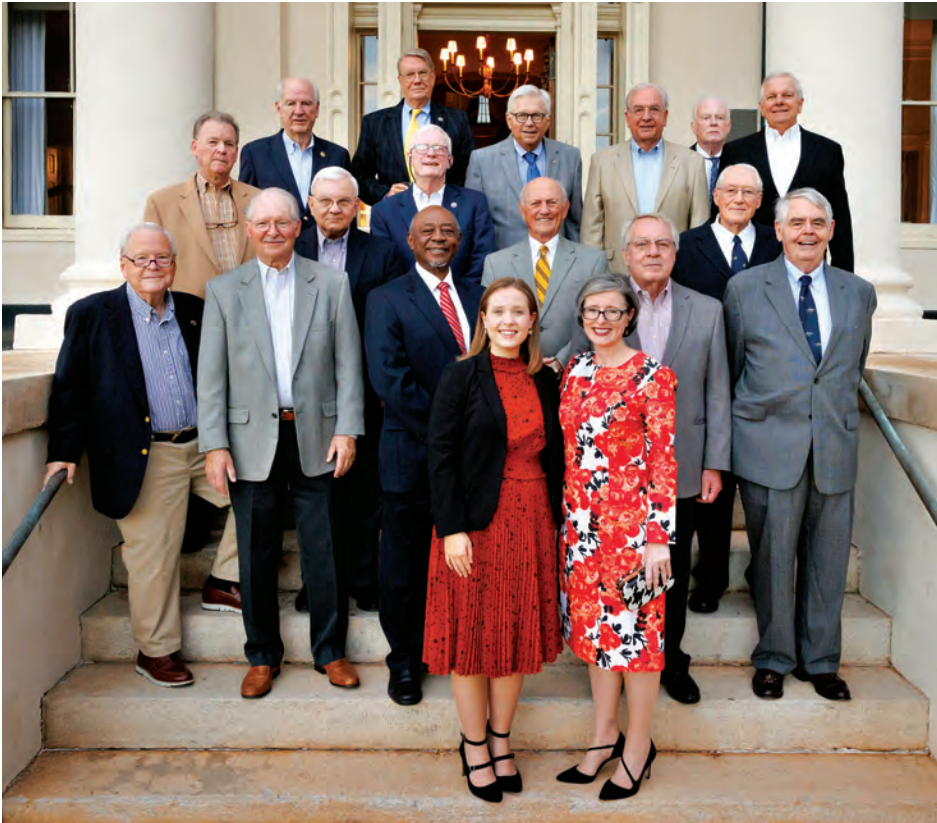
Scott G. Mills has joined Goggans, Stutzman, Hudson, Wilson & Mize, LLP as an associate focusing on commercial and residential real estate law matters.

Class of 1997

The Honorable Shondeana Morris was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

Class of 1998

Latesha Y. Bradley was appointed as the juvenile court judge for Lowndes County. Bradley will preside over judicial matters for Echols County, as well.



The Class of 1974 celebrated their 50th reunion with a dinner at the Woodruff House on Saturday, November 2, 2024. In attendance were Dean Karen J. Sneddon and Bailey Hotard, '25, the recipient of the Class of 1974 Scholarship for the 2024-2025 academic year. The first to establish a class-sponsored scholarship in 1980, '74, has awarded more than \$150,000 to date.

The Honorable Cheveda McCamy received the Thomas R. Burnside Jr. Excellence in Bar Leadership Award from the State Bar of Georgia.

Amy V. Humes Norris has joined the law firm of Goggan, Stutzman, Hudson, Wilson & Mize, LLP in the Columbus office.

Melissa H. Poole was appointed as the solicitor general of Long County by Governor Brian Kemp. Pool previously served as an assistant district attorney for the Atlantic Judicial Circuit and a solicitor for the City of Richmond Hill.

Class of 1999

Margaret "Maggie" Puccini was named a 2025 Super Lawyer. Puccini practices bankruptcy creditors' rights and commercial litigation at Bouhan Falligant in Savannah.

Class of 2000

Kristie Connell was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp. Connell is an assistant district attorney for the Columbia Circuit.

Jacob "Jake" E. Daly was elected to the board of directors of the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association (GDLA).

The Honorable Charles Evans was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp. Judge Evans is the presiding judge of the juvenile court of the Columbia Judicial Circuit.

Matthew K. Hube was sworn in as superior court judge for the Ogeechee Judicial Circuit.

Class of 2002

Karen E. Ferguson has joined The Hartford as a senior staff attorney.

Bradley M. Harmon was selected for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America 2025 and was selected as a 2025 Georgia Super Lawyer. Harmon practices construction litigation at HunterMaclean in Savannah.

Class of 2003

James "Jay" Crowe, Jr., was appointed by Governor Brian Kemp to be state court judge for Worth County.

Christopher J. Near was elected to shareholder in Ogletree Deakins' Columbia, South Carolina, office. Near practices throughout the United States as a strategic advisor to and advisor for contractors and subcontractors who do business with the federal government.

Darrell Sutton was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles G. Warren (Ret.) joined Campbell Law School in August as an assistant professor. Warren most recently served as a military appellate judge in the U.S. Air Force. He will teach Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure.

Class of 2004

Bryan E. Bates has joined Bradley Arant Boulton Cummings LLP as a partner in the Bankruptcy & Creditors' Rights Practice Group. Bates concentrates his practice on business bankruptcy, creditors' rights, and related commercial litigation. He is a director with the Southeastern Bankruptcy Law Institute and serves on the board of the Atlanta Chapter of the Turnaround Management Association.

Paul W. Hamilton was re-elected to the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Georgia. He will represent Brooks, Colquitt, Echols, Lowndes, and Thomas counties.

Continued >



In June 2024, Mercer Law alumni gathered at Amelia Island, Florida, for the State Bar of Georgia's Annual Meeting and enjoyed a special reception honoring Ivy Cadle, '07, who served as the Association's 62nd president in 2024.



Brandon L. Peak was inducted as a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, one of the premier legal associations in North America. Peak is a partner with Peak Wooten McDaniel & Colwell LLP, which handles significant cases throughout Georgia and the nation.

Zachary H. Thomas was reselected as an NTL – Civil Plaintiff Top 100 Trial Lawyer in the State of Georgia and recognized as a 2025 Georgia Super Lawyer for the third consecutive year. He serves on the board of the Civil Justice Political Action Committee of the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association.

Class of 2005

Anne Kaufold-Wiggins was appointed by Governor Brian Kemp to the Judicial Nominating Commission.

Nicholas J. Laybourn was selected for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America 2025. Laybourn practices commercial and construction litigation at HunterMaclean in Savannah.

Floyd S. “Trey” Mills III was recognized as a Super Lawyer in South Carolina for his work as a personal injury plaintiff’s lawyer.

Class of 2006

Jason D. Lewis was promoted to vice president of the board of the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association (GDLA).

Class of 2007

Jason W. Blanchard was selected as Homeland Security Investigation (HSI) Atlanta’s 2024 Prosecutor of the Year in the Southern District of Georgia for his work as an assistant United States attorney and Project Safe Childhood coordinator.

Matthew T. Butler was appointed as commonwealth’s attorney for the 47th Judicial Circuit in Kentucky by Governor Beshear on July 1, 2024. Following a contested November election, Butler retained his position and began a six-year term in January.

Joshua A. Carroll was elected as the 70th president of the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association (GTLA). As president, Carroll will oversee the Executive Committee, preside over GTLA officer meetings, and work with the association’s CEO regarding daily decision making and policy strategy.

Quentin L. Marlin was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

Haynes M. Studstill was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

Class of 2008

Jason T. Cummings has joined Gunder-son Dettmer as a partner in the Atlanta office. His practice focuses on finance transactions, strategic investments, merger and acquisitions, joint ventures, and other strategic business matters.

Georgia Representative Soo Hong was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

Darryl W. Lunon II was appointed as senior counsel to the vice chancellor and general counsel at Vanderbilt University.

Patrick Mincey was selected for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America for White Collar Criminal Defense, the Business North Carolina Legal Elite for 2025, and the 2025 North Carolina Super Lawyers list.

Class of 2009

Lindsey R. Stewart joined Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete, LLP as an associate. Stewart’s practice focuses on representing employers, insurers, and self-insured organizations in workers compensation defense cases.

Class of 2010

Joan McCallum, senior counsel in Chamberlain Hrdlicka’s Atlanta office in the Corporate, Securities and Finance Practice group, was ranked by Chambers & Partners, the leading independent professional legal research company, as an up-and-coming corporate/M&A attorney in Georgia.

Matthew C. Mitchell was appointed by Governor Kay Ivey as the district judge for the 38th Judicial Circuit in Jackson County, Alabama.

Brooke Newby was appointed to the Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Brian Kemp.

Erica Opitz, shareholder in Chamberlain Hrdlicka’s Atlanta office in the Corporate, Securities, and Finance practice group, was ranked by Chambers & Partners, the leading independent professional legal research company, among the top corporate/M&A attorneys in Georgia.

Trent Reichling was appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis to serve as judge on the 20th Judicial Circuit Court. Previously, Reichling served as an assistant United States attorney for the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Florida.

Barclay R. Taylor became a partner at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough in February.

Class of 2011

Dustin E. Davies completed his service as president of the Gainesville-Northeastern Bar Association. Davies was selected as a 2025 Georgia Super Lawyer Rising Star in personal injury for the 10th consecutive year.

Class of 2012

Randi Adkins-Warren was selected for the 40 Under 40 Class of 2025 by the Atlanta Business Chronicle.

Ryan W. English was appointed by Governor Brian Kemp as the solicitor general of Houston County and sworn in on April 3.

Class of 2013

Joel Graham has joined NASA as the associate administrator for the Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. In the role, Graham will lead and coordinate all communications with the U.S. Congress and serve as a senior advisor to agency leadership on legislative matters.

Maha Khalaj was elected to partner at Kilpatrick, Townsend & Stockton LLP. Khalaj’s practice focuses on technology and intellectual property transactions.

Patrick G. McKenzie was named partner at ReedSmith in the Atlanta office. His practice focuses primarily on representing private equity funds and their portfolio companies in corporate transactions.

Class of 2014

Jennifer M. Howard won the Rising Star award from the Colorado chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Class of 2015

Mattie Tondreault was appointed to the State of Florida’s 10th Judicial Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission by Governor Ron DeSantis.

Class of 2016

J. Micah Dickie was named partner at Fisher & Phillips LLP in January.

Class of 2018

Halton “Tony” Albritton is a partner with Hall Booth Smith in their Columbus office. Albritton’s practice focuses on medical malpractice, government liability, insurance defense, and premises liability.

Dr. Diantha Ellis has been named the assistant vice president of policy and compliance at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. Ellis will provide administrative oversight for institutional policy development and review, academic compliance, institutional research, and institutional effectiveness.

Anna G. Mills joined Leitner, Williams, Dooley & Napolitan, PLLC as a licensed associate attorney in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Her primary practice areas are general liability, juvenile law, wills and trusts, and workers’ compensation law.

Class of 2020

J. Hunter Moreland was promoted to partner at Hoffman & Associates, LLC. Moreland’s practice focuses on estate planning, probate, and tax matters.

Nicholas B. Tuz has joined the Atlanta office of Wood, Smith, Henning and Berman as a senior associate.

Class of 2021

Victoria Nease was recognized as Ones to Watch by The Best Lawyers in America 2025 and was named a 2025 Georgia Rising Star. Nease practices transportation and maritime law with HunterMaclean in Savannah.

Class of 2022

E. Chris Blessy joined Swift Currie as an associate in the firm’s coverage and commercial litigation practice group. His practice focuses on automobile litigation, trucking and transportation litigation, commercial litigation, general liability, and premises liability. Blessy is a member of the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association, State Bar of Georgia, and the Claims and Litigation Management Alliance.

Forbes C. Ouzts joined Coleman Talley as an associate in the Jacksonville, Florida, office. Following graduation from law school, Ouzts obtained his LL.M. in taxation from the University of Florida Levin College of Law.

Class of 2023

Nathaniel Stinson, Jr., is proudly serving his country as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps. Stinson is a first lieutenant.

Katherine L. Twomey has joined Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law as a visiting assistant professor of law.

Class of 2024

Luckshume Ketheeswaran has joined HunterMaclean as an associate of the firm’s Litigation and Employment groups.

Kayla Pfeifer joined Baker Donelson as an associate. Pfeifer focuses her practice on various litigation matters.

To be included in the next issue of Mercer Lawyer, email your Class Notes to news@law.mercer.edu.



Alumni Dinner 2025



Thank You to Our 2025 Alumni Dinner Sponsors

Leaders Circle

Cook Law Group LLC
Slappy & Sadd LLC

Founders Circle

Kilpatrick Townsend
& Stockton LLP
King & Spalding LLP
Peak Wooten McDaniel
& Colwell LLP

Barristers Circle

Balch & Bingham LLP
Stacey Evans Law
Hummel Trial Law
Kicklighter Law PC
Rhonda Wilcox
McCurtain, '02

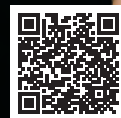
Dean's Circle

The Law Offices of
Tanya D. Jeffords &
Associates PC
Bethany M. Rezek, '06
Karen J. Sneddon and
Matthew E. Silverman
Nancy F. Terrill, '78

Partners

Bryan O. Babcock, '08
Leslie L., '07, and
Ivy N. Cadle, '07
Autumn T. and
J. Daniel Cole, '12
Conley Griggs Partin LLP
Couch Law Firm LLC
Laura A., '08, and
Alec F. Denton
Committee to Elect
Judge Sara Doyle
Jill U. Edmondson, '05
Friends of Judge
Rachel Krause
D'Andrea
Morning-McCants, '07
Amanda M. Morejon, '17
Rizza P., '10, and
Daniel J. O'Connor, '12
Kevin Charles Patrick, '08
Sutton Law Group
Andrea and Lawrence
Williford

If you or your firm would
like to be a sponsor for
the 2026 Alumni Dinner on
February 27, please contact
Andrea Williford at
williford_a@mercercer.edu
or (478) 301-2180.



JAMIE TUCKER PHOTOS



SCHOOL OF LAW

1021 Georgia Avenue, Macon, Georgia 31207
law.mercer.edu

Save *the* Date



Mercer Law Annual Alumni Dinner

Friday, February 27, 2026 | InterContinental Buckhead, Atlanta, GA

Find more details and updates at law.mercer.edu/alumnidinner.

