MERCER Lawyer

A PUBLICATION OF MERCER UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

2026 ISSUE



BALANCE

Mercer lawyers reveal how they make space for professional fulfillment, personal joy and sustainable wellness.

MERCER
Lawyer
2026

PRESIDENT
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DEAN
KAREN J. SNEDDON

EDITOR
MARY ANN HOWARD

FACULTY EDITOR
CRAIG SENN

DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI PROGRAMS AND ENGAGEMENT
ANDREA WILLIFORD

DESIGN
MELISSA MITCHELL

PHOTOGRAPHY
ART PHOTOGRAPHY
JESSICA GRATIGNY
JASON HURST PHOTOGRAPHY
MAGGIE REIMER
JAMIE TUCKER
JESSICA WHITLEY
LEAH YETTER

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
MARY ANN HOWARD
MARILYN E. SUTTON

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, Ga. 31207, or e-mailed to **news@law.mercer.edu**.

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

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1021 Georgia Avenue
Macon, Georgia 31207

Contents

FEATURES

6
Choosing a Path
With no single blueprint for success, Mercer lawyers share the career choices that have led them to meaningful and fulfilling professional lives.





12
The Well-Balanced Advocate
Alumni reflect on the habits and priorities that help them thrive both professionally and personally.

19
Building a Culture
A new student organization offers well-being for anyone looking to have some fun and exercise the body and mind.

21
More than a Game
How intramural sports help students find balance during the rigors of law school.

22
Mercer Law Admissions
From first inquiry to first day of class, inside the work of the admissions team as they recruit, guide and welcome the next generation of Mercer lawyers.



DEPARTMENTS

2 On the Docket
24 Faculty Profile
26 Student Profile
28 Commencement
30 Faculty News
32 Class Notes
36 Alumni Dinner

From the Dean

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Law school has the unique distinction of being one of the few graduate or professional schools without a prescribed path. Each journey to, through and beyond law school is distinctive.

That uniqueness is evident in the Mercer Law Class of 2029. This fall, the Law School welcomed the highest-credentialed class in Mercer Law history. The median LSAT is two points higher than last year and four points higher than two years ago. Their undergraduate majors range from agribusiness to urban studies, and their extracurricular activities and leadership experiences are equally varied. This talented class of students is ready to develop their knowledge base, refine their skills and embrace their values in the service of the law.



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

Individuals may be called to the law by a multitude of circumstances and experiences, but our students, like our alumni, share a common commitment to service. That commitment was reflected in the first event of first-year orientation. For the fourth consecutive year, first-year students were invited to participate in service-learning opportunities at the Brookdale Resource Center and the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank. Beginning with service sets the foundation for the three years to come.

Just as the journey to law school varies for our students, so too does the journey through law school. Cold calls and case briefs remain constants, but the opportunities available both in and beyond the classroom continue to evolve. Midterms are now a regular feature of the semester dynamic, and application beyond the classroom has become routine. During the 2025–26 academic year, 168 students participated in at least one externship, field placement or clinic. Of those students, 60 participated in more than one externship, field placement or clinic. These experiences help students apply classroom learning to real world situations.

During the same year, 72 students competed in 36 external advocacy competitions, ranging from mock trial to mediation. Teams advanced in more than 80% of the competitions they entered and earned three national championships. The program is ranked No. three in the Gavel National Mock Trial Rankings.

Development of interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills supports many student journeys. Mercer Law has also recommitted to its relationship with the Georgia Legal History Foundation, renewing connections with the Journal of Southern Legal History and expanding the journal experience for law students. Law students may now become members of the Mercer Law Review or the Journal of Southern Legal History. They work collaboratively with each other and with authors. Collaborative work and leadership support the Law School's almost 40 student organizations. The student organizations invite speakers to campus and organize events that draw together the community. This commitment to community is one of the reasons that the law students have again won the Law School Division of the Georgia Legal Food Frenzy. This year, they raised a record amount to support the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank. In part due to these efforts and the development of signature programs like Wellness Week, the Mercer Law Student Bar Association has been named the 2026 American Bar Association Law Student Division's Student Bar Association of the year.

All of these experiences, both in and out of the classroom, help students recognize their journey may take many paths after law school. As highlighted in this issue, Mercer law graduates pursue a wide range of practice areas throughout the country. They may pivot to different employment settings, and they explore new professional opportunities along the way. They also recognize that the journey requires balance. Attention to professional accomplishments need not come at the expense of personal joys. Wellness and well-being matter. Wellness and well-being support the varied journeys.

At Mercer Law, we are committed to supporting the journey from applicant to alumnus. All our alumni and friends are part of that support. That commitment is quite evident through our 150 for All Campaign. This special Law School campaign has focused on three pillars: Access for All, Success for All and Facilities for All.

The campaign has already made a meaningful difference in the lives of Mercer Law students. Students are receiving valuable scholarships, gaining transformative experiences both in and beyond the classroom, and benefiting from a supportive physical environment in which to learn, connect and grow. The campaign officially ends on Dec. 31, so there is still time to be part of this important effort. Every gift, no matter the amount, makes a lasting difference. Each gift helps shape the future of Mercer University School of Law.

After 150 years, we're just getting started!



Karen J. Sneddon
Dean and Professor of Law

[ON THE *Docket*]

Mercer Law Confers Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree Upon the Hon. Erica L. Woodford



LEAH YETTER PHOTO

President Penny L. Elkins, Ph.D, the Hon. Erica L. Woodford, and Dean Karen J. Sneddon

During Mercer University School of Law's commencement ceremony on May 8, President Penny L. Elkins, Ph.D., conferred upon keynote speaker the Hon. Erica L. Woodford, CLAS '97, the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. The honorary Doctor of Laws degree is among the highest distinctions a university can bestow, recognizing individuals whose professional achievements, leadership and service have made a significant impact on the law, the justice system and society. Conferred upon distinguished leaders in the legal profession and public service, the degree reflects exceptional accomplishment, integrity and dedication to advancing the public good.

Woodford has served as clerk of Superior Court of Bibb County since her election in 2012 and was re-elected in 2016, 2020 and 2024.

Before her election to public office, Woodford practiced law for nearly a decade, representing clients in juvenile, family, and criminal matters. She later served as associate judge and magistrate in Bibb County Civil and Magistrate Courts.

Woodford also led the Enslaved People Project alongside Professor Emeritus Dr. Chester Fontenot and attorney Stephanie Woods Miller, resulting in the digitization and public accessibility of nearly 1,000 deed transactions documenting the sale of enslaved African Americans. The initiative received the 2023 Historic Preservation Award from Historic Macon Foundation.

A committed educator, Woodford currently serves as an adjunct professor at Mercer University School of Law, where she has become a familiar presence throughout students' legal education.

A native of Macon, Woodford earned her bachelor of arts in political science and African American studies from Mercer University and her juris doctor from Cumberland School of Law at Samford University.

Chen Receives Legal Award for AAPI Heritage Month



Kayla Chen, '17, received the Georgia Asian Pacific American Bar Association (GAPABA) Rising Star Award, an honor granted in celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month.

Chen is a wealth strategist and senior vice president at Truist Wealth, where she works to help clients achieve their financial, tax, business succession and estate planning goals.

Prior to joining Truist, Chen began her legal career at Drew Eckl & Farnham and later practiced at Cohen Pollock Merlin Turner in Atlanta, where her work included estate planning, probate, fiduciary litigation and corporate representation for businesses of all sizes.

She earned degrees from Georgia State University, where she majored in pre-law studies and political science, and a certificate from the American College of Trust and Estates Counsel Fellows Institute. She also served as co-chair of the GAPABA's Women's Leadership Network from 2019 to 2021. Currently she is director of Campers in Leadership Training for Camp Cherith in the Carolinas board of directors and is a board member for Georgia Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

AAPI Heritage Month, celebrated every year in May, honors the role Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have played in shaping American history and culture.

Grist Named Macon Bar Association Lawyer of the Year



Rebecca Liles Grist, ’94, was named the 2026 Lawyer of the Year by the Macon Bar Association, recognizing a distinguished career of public service, leadership and advocacy for victims and communities across Georgia.

On Jan. 1, 2013, Grist became the first woman elected solicitor-general of Bibb County. Backed by overwhelming support from the Macon Bar Association, she was re-elected unopposed in 2016, 2020 and 2024. Before taking office, she spent 16 years as an assistant solicitor-general specializing in domestic violence prosecution.

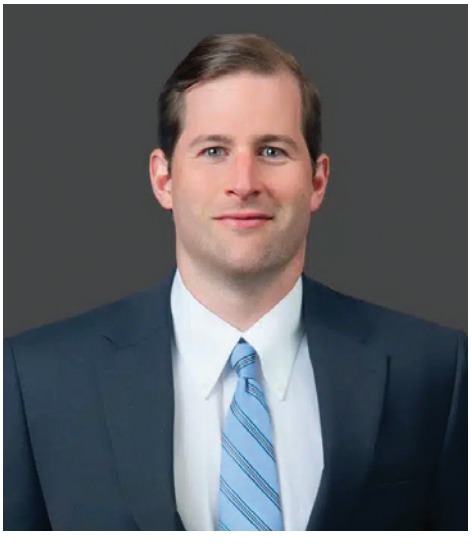
Throughout her career, Grist has worked to protect vulnerable populations and strengthen public safety. She partnered with the U.S. Attorney’s Office to help shut down illicit massage parlors and combat sex trafficking through solicitation and prostitution prosecutions. She began her legal career in the district attorney’s office with Child Support Enforcement.

In February, the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia honored Grist with its Lifetime Achievement Award. She was also named Georgia’s Solicitor-General of the Year in 2018 by the Georgia Association of Solicitors-General, where she later served as president and chaired the Legislative Committee.

Grist has served on the Prosecuting Attorneys’ Council of Georgia, the State Bar of Georgia’s Board of Governors and currently serves as secretary of the Georgia Bar Foundation. She also chaired the CLE Committee for the Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism and served on Governor Nathan Deal’s Criminal Justice Reform Commission.

A dedicated community leader, Grist serves as president of the Macon Rotary Club and has held leadership roles with Crisis Line & Safe House of Central Georgia, the Junior League of Macon, her church and the Salvation Army of Central Georgia. Her honors include Macon Magazine’s Top 40 Under 40, Girl Scouts Woman of Achievement and the 2026 Cody Award, recognizing outstanding community contributions.

Grist and her husband, Joel Grist, ’95, have two adult children.



Kirbo, ’16, Serving as Macon Bar Association President

Barret Kirbo, ’16, has been elected president of the Macon Bar Association for 2026–27. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia in 2011, graduating with majors in political science and international affairs. Kirbo earned his law degree, cum laude, from Mercer University School of Law and began his legal career at Macon firm Jones Cork, LLP. During his five years there, he primarily represented businesses in commercial and construction disputes and defendants in personal injury cases.

Kirbo is now an attorney with Reynolds, Horne & Survant, where he practices alongside his father-in-law, Carl Reynolds, ’66 and his wife, Kate Kirbo, ’16.

He is a member of the State Bar of Georgia and Macon Bar Young Lawyers Division. As president of MBA, Kirbo will help lead the association’s efforts to support the local legal community and advance the profession in Macon.

Kirbo enjoys hunting and fishing, watching UGA football and the Atlanta Braves and spending time in the outdoors with his family. Kirbo and Kate share three children and a yellow lab named Hank.

Mercer Law Welcomes New Faculty

Visiting Professor Emily Shaffett

Emily Shaffett joins Mercer Law as a visiting professor, where she teaches Legal Process, Legal Writing II and Bar Preparation. Before joining Mercer, she served as a visiting professor and co-director of the Common Law Bar Program at Southern University Law Center. Her work in bar preparation has focused on individualized tutoring, workshops and program development designed to help students build the skills and confidence needed for success in law school and on the bar exam.



Shaffett's scholarship centers on cognitive approaches to student learning and performance, with particular emphasis on legal education, academic success, bar preparation and professional development. She has authored numerous bar exam outlines and instructional resources, presented on "NextGen Collaboration: Building Bridges to Student Success" in 2026 and has a forthcoming co-authored article examining faculty collaboration in preparing students for the NextGen Bar Exam.

She earned her J.D. from Southern University Law Center and her B.A. from Louisiana State University. A member of the Louisiana State Bar Association, she has passed multiple state-specific bar exams.

Visiting Professor David Abney

This fall, David Abney teaches Legal Process while leading Mercer Law's student mentoring program and supervising the Enhanced Academic Success Program. He also serves on an ad hoc committee dedicated to promoting academic excellence and ensuring students receive meaningful support from admission through bar licensure.

Abney earned his Ph.D. in Instructional Communication from the University of Kentucky College of Communication and Information, his J.D. from the University of Kentucky College of Law and his B.A. from Mercer University. Before joining Mercer, he taught communication and composition at the University of Kentucky and founded the Law Office of David Abney, where he focuses on defending ERISA healthcare beneficiaries against subrogation and reimbursement claims.



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTOS

Since 2021, he has also served as Of Counsel to ZipLiens. He has presented more than 100 continuing legal education seminars on ERISA, legal ethics, Medicare and Medicaid and authored three book chapters on ERISA. His research explores how law students develop professional identities through social and emotional learning, and he is licensed to practice law in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Richelle Reid: Law Library Director and Associate Professor of Law



Richelle Reid joined Mercer University School of Law in July 2026 as law library director and associate professor of law. She oversees library operations, services and collections and will teach Introduction to Legal Research and Advanced Legal Research beginning fall 2026.

Reid brings extensive academic law library experience, including six years at North Carolina Central University School of Law, serving as assistant director and interim director since 2024, where she managed operations, taught research courses and co-developed the Strategies for Research Success program. She began her law librarianship at Emory University School of Law in 2010, co-designing the Mastery of Legal Research Course Series and leading student engagement initiatives.

Her teaching and research interests include library marketing, universal design for learning, the impact of artificial intelligence on legal information literacy, and wellness. Reid holds a J.D. from Georgia State University College of Law, an MLIS from Valdosta State University, and a B.A. from UNC–Chapel Hill. She is active in AALL and SEAALL leadership and is a past president of the Atlanta Law Libraries Association.

Visiting Professor Rachel Ness-Maddox, '21



Rachel Ness-Maddox joins Mercer Law as a visiting assistant professor of law for the 2026–27 academic year, where she teaches Torts and Legal Writing II. A Middle Georgia native, she earned her J.D. from Mercer University School of Law and her B.A. in English from Middle Georgia State University. Before joining Mercer, she practiced as an associate attorney at Chambless, Higdon, Richardson, Katz & Griggs. She previously served as an assistant public defender in the metro Atlanta area and as a staff attorney at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.

Ness-Maddox's research focuses on civil practice and procedure, criminal procedure and constitutional law, with particular interests in equal protection and voting rights. She has published both a case note on criminal procedure and a comment on criminal sentencing, reflecting her commitment to scholarship in these areas.

As a Mercer alumna, Ness-Maddox is excited to return to her alma mater and support students through practical instruction, legal writing and mentorship as they develop the skills needed for successful legal careers.

Virginia Josey, '16, Serving as YLD President



Virginia Josey assumed the presidency of the State Bar of Georgia Young Lawyers Division during the Bar's annual meeting at Amelia Island in June. A dedicated trial lawyer and servant-leader, Josey has been a steadfast supporter of Mercer Law's advocacy program — coaching multiple mock trial teams for more than five years and teaching Advanced Litigation Drafting to second- and third-year students. She also serves as chair of the Georgia Bar's High School Mock Trial, is a faculty member of the Georgia High School Mock Trial Academy and volunteers as a mock interviewer for Mercer's 1L students.

Josey's professional honors reflect her courtroom skill and leadership. She has been recognized three times as a National Trial Lawyers Association Top 40 Under 40 honoree in the civil plaintiff category and completed training at the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association's Trial and Mediation Academy. She is also an alumna of the State Bar's Young Lawyers Division Leadership Academy and the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association's LEAD program. In February, she received Mercer Law's Young Alumna Volunteer of the Year Award.

Her community engagement is broad and sustained. Josey serves as a regional representative for Legal Food Frenzy in support of the Middle Georgia Food Bank, has spoken statewide on victim protections with the Middle Georgia Alliance to End Regional Trafficking and is a past president of the Middle Georgia Women Lawyers Association. She remains active across numerous professional organizations.

A Texas native raised in Georgia, Josey earned her undergraduate degree with honors from Georgia Southern University. During law school she served as honor court justice and president of the Advocacy Council, competed nationally, won the James C. Estes Moot Court Award and was inducted into the Order of Barristers.

She lives in Middle Georgia with her husband Jordan, '16, and their son. Outside the office she enjoys baking, live music, travel and spending time with family and friends.

Note: Josey marks the third Mercer alumni to serve as YLD president in the last four years: Ron Daniels, '12, served as president in 2023-24 and Veronica Cox, '18, served 2025-26. Kindall Browning-Rickle, '15, has been elected to serve as president in 2027-28.



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO



JESSICA WHITLEY PHOTOS



1Ls Begin Law School With Service and Civic Engagement

As part of orientation in August, incoming 1Ls participated in meaningful service learning experiences. Students worked alongside local partners — Brookdale Resource Center 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.

Choosing a Path

From Public Service to Private Practice, Alumni Share the Paths They Chose and Why

One of the first questions law students encounter is also one of the most enduring: What kind of lawyer do you want to be? The answer may seem straightforward at first, but for most attorneys it evolves over time, shaped by experience, opportunity, personal priorities, and a growing understanding of what brings fulfillment.

The legal profession offers no single roadmap. Some lawyers are drawn to large firms, where specialization, teamwork and sophisticated matters provide opportunities for growth and impact. Others find their place in mid-sized or small firms, balancing professional challenges with close client relationships and broader responsibilities. Some choose the independence of solo practice, building a business that reflects their own vision and values.

For others, the strongest calling is public service. Whether serving as prosecutors, public defenders, government attorneys, legal aid advocates or members of the judiciary, these lawyers are motivated by the opportunity to serve communities and help ensure access to justice. Their work often carries a different measure of success, one rooted in service, stewardship and public trust.

The Mercer lawyers featured in this issue each followed one of these paths. Some always knew where they wanted to go. Others discovered their calling through unexpected opportunities, influential mentors or changing personal circumstances. Along the way, they learned that career decisions are rarely permanent and that professional fulfillment often comes from aligning one's work with one's values, strengths and goals.

Their stories demonstrate that success in the law is not defined by a particular practice setting, title or career trajectory. Rather, it is found in the thoughtful choices lawyers make as they build careers that reflect who they are and how they hope to contribute.

Together, these alumni offer a portrait of a profession rich with possibilities. Their experiences remind us that there is no single way to build a meaningful life in the law, only the ongoing pursuit of work that challenges, inspires and serves.

Public Service

REBECCA GRIST

Bibb County Solicitor-General

For Rebecca L. Grist, '94, public service was never simply a career path — it was a calling. Today, as Bibb County Solicitor-General, she has spent more than three decades in prosecution, advocacy and community leadership, work she says has "never felt like 'work.'"

Like many law students, Grist once imagined a different future.

"I thought I would get a big job in Atlanta and go make lots of money," she recalled. But during law school, a clerkship with the U.S. Attorney's Office changed everything.

"I was hooked," she said.

Since then, she has devoted her career to public service, first as an assistant district attorney, then assistant solicitor-general, and since 2013, as Bibb County's elected solicitor-general.

"The only real trade-off I saw was the lower salary," she said. "But I really didn't care because the job fed my soul. I have helped thousands of crime victims through advocacy for better laws and resources."

That sense of purpose deepened as Georgia's family violence laws evolved. Grist not only prosecuted cases under those laws but also helped strengthen protections through legislative advocacy. She worked with community partners — including her church, the Junior League of Macon and the Salvation Army — to establish what became the Crisis Line and Safe House of Central Georgia, which now provides counseling, shelter, legal advocacy and support services for survivors of domestic violence.

For Grist, the work has always extended beyond the courtroom.

"I honestly do not see any dividing line between my work in my office and the community around me," she said. "They are all intricately connected.



Rebecca Grist, '94, Joel Grist, '95 and Bill Adams, '77

"I have always been a social worker at heart," she added. "Being an attorney has allowed me to do so much on a policy level."

As a misdemeanor prosecutor, she says she values the opportunity not only to hold offenders accountable but also to connect defendants with therapy or training that can redirect their lives. "Being successful at that, even in small ways, feeds me."

One case crystallized why she continues the work. Over several years, Grist prosecuted a woman's abusive partner multiple times as the victim struggled to leave a violent, drug-fueled relationship. Eventually, the woman escaped, regained custody of her children, found stable work and later spoke at a domestic violence awareness event, inspiring other survivors.

"She and others like her," Grist said, "remind me that I am exactly where I'm supposed to be, doing exactly what I am supposed to do."

Mid-Size Firm

JOSHUA SNELL

Associate James Bates Brannan Groover LLP

When Joshua Snell, '22, began law school, he had a clear vision for his future. He wanted to become a criminal prosecutor, a goal he successfully achieved early in his career. The work was meaningful and rewarding, but as his life and responsibilities evolved, so did his professional priorities. That led him from the public sector to James Bates Brannan Groover LLP, a mid-sized firm — 30 of their 60 attorneys are Mercer Law alumni — where he has practiced civil law for the past two years. The transition offered more than financial opportunity, it provided the balance he was seeking between professional success and personal fulfillment.

For Snell, the appeal of a mid-sized firm was its ability to bridge the gap between two competing interests. Public service had provided purpose, while larger firms often promised higher compensation. Yet he was hesitant about pursuing a path known for demanding billing requirements and long hours.

"I wanted a job that represented a balance between those two interests," he explained.

Continued ...



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

A piece of advice he received early in his career helped shape that decision. An attorney once told him he would need to decide whether he wanted to "live to work or work to live." While becoming a lawyer remains one of his proudest accomplishments, Snell ultimately chose a professional environment that supports life beyond the office.

That philosophy aligns closely with what he values most about the culture of a mid-sized firm: collaboration and mentorship.

"A lot of importance is placed on mentorship at my firm," he said. "The practice of law inevitably requires practice, so having consistent access to mentors has helped me ensure my work is the best it can be."

Snell believes the mid-sized firm environment encourages collective success. He describes a workplace where attorneys and staff regularly consult one another to provide the best possible service to clients.

Instead of measuring success by outperforming colleagues, Snell focuses on continuous self-improvement.

"I am competing with myself," he said, "constantly trying to be a better lawyer than the day before."

For law students considering their own career paths, Snell believes mid-sized firms offer an ideal environment to transform classroom knowledge into practical experience. With accessible mentors and a collaborative culture, they provide opportunities for growth while allowing attorneys to build fulfilling careers both inside and outside the office.

Public Interest

SHANNON MILLS

Director of Attorney Recruitment and Engagement at Georgia Legal Services Program



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

When Shannon Mills, '17, entered law school, he imagined a future in business and corporate law. A Mercer University graduate twice over, with an undergraduate background in management and finance, he initially saw the legal profession through a traditional lens of business opportunities and professional advancement. But along the way, something more meaningful called him back to the reasons he wanted to become a lawyer in the first place.

Today, Mills serves as director of Attorney Recruitment and Engagement at Georgia Legal Services Program (GLSP), where he helps connect future lawyers with careers dedicated to serving communities in need. After nearly a decade with the organization, he cannot imagine doing anything else.

"I truly love this work," Mills said. "I feel such a sense of pride being able to be an advocate for the community."

His path toward public service crystallized during the summer of 2016 while working at the National Criminal Defense College. There, he met attorneys whose careers were centered on helping vulnerable populations and advancing justice. The experience reignited a passion for community advocacy that had inspired him long before law school.

That passion led him to join GLSP as an Equal Justice Works Fellow in the Georgia Housing Corps after passing the bar. He has remained committed to public service ever since.

Mills acknowledges that choosing public interest law often means turning away from the financial rewards associated with private practice. The tradeoff, however, has never felt like a sacrifice.

"Serving my local community is one of the most valuable things I can do with my time and career," he said.

Over time, that perspective has fundamentally changed how he defines success. As a law student, he viewed success as material accumulations. Today, he measures it through community impact, relationships and the positive changes that occur when people work together to solve problems. Recently, Mills earned national recognition as an Equal Justice Works 40x40 Alumni Change Maker.

Some of his most meaningful moments come years after a case has ended. Former clients still stop him in the community to express gratitude for having someone advocate on their behalf during difficult times. Those encounters remind him that legal representation is about far more than outcomes, it is about ensuring people know they are not facing challenges alone.

Public service has also shaped Mills personally, deepening his compassion and understanding of others. Through years of advocacy, he has learned that anyone can find themselves in need of help. For him, that realization reinforces a simple truth: a legal career devoted to serving others is a career worth loving.

Large Firm

ANITA THOMAS

Partner, Nelson Mullins

For Anita Thomas, '86, choosing a large law firm was ultimately about opportunity, the opportunity to handle complex work, build relationships across industries and jurisdictions and draw on the resources of a firm with a national reach.

Thomas did not begin her career in Big Law. She started as an assistant district attorney in Fulton County, where she quickly learned the fundamentals of litigation. Her first case was a murder trial.

"I learned how to try cases there," she said. "I learned how to tell a story and present it to the jury."

The experience gave Thomas a strong foundation in trial work and a deep appreciation for public service. But after several years as a prosecutor, she wanted to broaden her experience. She moved to a mid-sized firm, where she gained civil litigation experience.

Then came an opportunity to join Nelson Mullins.

Thomas was ready for a bigger platform.

"I'd already been at a mid-sized firm, and I just thought that the opportunities at a larger firm would be better," she said.

The firm offered the chance to work on "more sophisticated complex litigation" and, just as importantly, the infrastructure and geographic reach to support clients with increasingly complex needs.

More than 20 years later, Thomas has spent most of her career as a partner at Nelson Mullins, which has more than 1,000 attorneys across 27 states. For her, the value of a large firm is not simply its size. It is what that size makes possible.

Thomas practices employment and commercial litigation, but her clients often need more than one kind of legal expertise. A large firm allows her to connect those clients with attorneys who have the right experience, even when the work falls outside her practice or outside Georgia.

She recently participated in a pitch for a Fortune 500 company that needed legal services beyond her own area of practice. Thomas was able to bring in partners from South Carolina and Chicago.

"That is a benefit of being in a larger firm that I would not have been able to take full advantage of if I was at a smaller firm that had a smaller footprint," she said.

That breadth also creates opportunities for attorneys who enjoy building relationships and developing business. At a large firm, Thomas says, success is measured not only by productivity, billable hours and collections, but also by a partner's ability to identify opportunities and bring work into the firm and to make contributions to the firm through service on firm committees.

"It is the ability to attract business from clients, to develop business, to go out, identify opportunities, pursue those opportunities, and bring work in," she said.

Thriving in that environment requires more than strong legal skills.



"I decided that I was ready to make the transition to what most people regard as big law. I'd already been at a mid-sized firm, and I just thought that the opportunities at a larger firm would be better for me."

— Anita Thomas

Thomas describes successful lawyers as resilient, strategic, forward-thinking, and responsive with a genuine service mindset.

"My job is to deliver a result," she said.

Thomas has also helped expand what leadership looks like within a large firm. She became Nelson Mullins' first Black woman equity partner, but, she says, "I'm not the last."

And while large-firm practice can be demanding and highly competitive, Thomas has never viewed it as incompatible with service. Nelson Mullins places a strong emphasis on pro bono work and community involvement, allowing her to continue the commitment to service that shaped her career from the beginning.

For Thomas, that may be the greatest advantage of a large firm: a bigger platform does not have to mean a smaller sense of purpose.



Steven McNeel, '06, Jed Hill, '05, Stephen Welsh, '94, Josh Carroll, '07, and Chad Ethridge, '13

Small Firm

BUZZELL, WELSH & HILL

Success for Stephen M. Welsh, '94, has never been measured by prestige, billable hours or the skyline outside an office window. Instead, it is defined by impact, relationships and building a life rooted in community.

When Welsh entered Mercer Law School, he imagined a very different future. After clerking at King & Spalding before law school, he assumed he would eventually work at a large Atlanta firm.

"That was really my frame of reference for what practicing law looked like," he said. He admired the prestige and resources of big-firm practice, but he also saw the personal cost. Attorneys routinely sacrificed evenings, weekends and family time to meet demanding workloads.

One moment near the end of law school crystallized his thinking. After a recruiting dinner, the attorneys hosting the event returned to the office at 10 p.m. to continue working.

"At that point," Welsh recalled, "it became pretty clear to me that wasn't the kind of career or lifestyle I wanted."

Instead, Welsh and his wife Susan chose to stay in Macon, where he discovered he was far more drawn to helping individuals than serving large corporate clients. Although he began his career at a larger defense firm representing insurance companies, the work felt disconnected from the reason he went to law school.

"I didn't feel like I was making a difference," he said. "I wanted to work directly with individuals and make more of a difference in people's lives."

"Being able to level that playing field and actually change someone's situation, that's what success looks like to me."

— Stephen Welsh

That desire ultimately led him to Buzzell, Welsh & Hill, now a six-attorney firm where every lawyer is a Mercer Law graduate who intentionally chose to build careers and families in Middle Georgia.

For Welsh, the appeal of small-firm practice begins with autonomy.

"The partners set the direction, build the culture, and decide how to handle cases," he said. "You are practicing law the way you think is right for your clients."

He believes attorneys who thrive in small firms are self-motivated, enjoy direct client relationships and are comfortable taking initiative early in their careers.

Young lawyers in a small firm, he says, often gain meaningful responsibility much sooner than they would at a larger firm, handling clients, depositions, negotiations and court appearances with guidance from partners.

Equally important are the personal relationships formed with clients during difficult moments in their lives.

"A big part of the job is just making them feel like someone is in their corner," Welsh said. "I genuinely believe a happy lawyer is a better lawyer."

Sole Practitioner

ZACHARY H. THOMAS LAW, P.C.

For Zach Thomas, ’04, opening his own law firm was never part of a carefully mapped-out career plan. Instead, it was a decision shaped slowly over nearly two decades of practicing law, learning from mentors and discovering what mattered most to him as an attorney.

Thomas, founding attorney of his firm established in 2021, began his legal career at a large plaintiff’s firm in Savannah before spending 14 years at a smaller medical malpractice firm. Those years gave him invaluable courtroom experience and, just as importantly, strong mentorship.

“For most of my career, I was focused on learning as much as possible from other attorneys,” he said. “Mentorship was an important part of my growth.”

After 17 years with established firms, Thomas felt ready to build something of his own. His decision was driven less by ambition and more by a desire for flexibility, meaningful client relationships and the ability to shape a practice around his own values.



“Practicing law is only one part of running a successful law firm. I had to learn how to operate a business, market myself, manage cashflow and so much more, all while still representing my clients and keeping their cases moving.”

— Zach Thomas

“Client connection was important,” Thomas explained. “I wanted the opportunity to connect individually with each client, understand their stories and build strong relationships.”

In a solo practice, he finds the freedom to devote more personal attention to clients and carefully choose the cases he takes.

That freedom, however, came with challenges. One of the biggest surprises of solo practice was realizing how much more running a law firm has to do than just practicing law itself. Thomas suddenly found himself responsible not only for legal work, but also for marketing, cash flow, business operations and every administrative detail in between.

“The biggest risk was knowing that I am responsible for everything,” he said. “From representing clients down to the electricity bill.”

The early years demanded intense discipline and long hours, with little separation between professional and personal life. Over time, though, Thomas learned the importance of boundaries and sustainability. He discovered that flexibility in solo practice only works when paired with organization, realistic expectations, and careful time management.

Despite the uncertainty and pressure, Thomas says the rewards have outweighed the risks. Beyond practicing law, owning his own firm has given him the opportunity to become more involved in his community, volunteer with local nonprofits and build relationships outside the legal profession.

As his confidence and practice have grown, so has his sense of fulfillment.

“That risk was worth taking,” Thomas said. “I would encourage anyone looking to start a solo practice to accept that responsibility and not let it discourage you from taking the big step.”

Thomas serves on the Mercer Law Board of Visitors. ■

THE *Well-Balanced* ADVOCATE

HOW LAWYERS ARE PRIORITIZING WELLNESS, RESILIENCE AND LIFE BEYOND THE OFFICE

For generations, practicing law has been synonymous with endurance, late nights, relentless deadlines, and the quiet understanding that personal needs sometimes yield to professional demands. But across the profession, a more sustainable vision is taking shape. Increasingly, attorneys are recognizing that long-term success is not defined solely by how much they can carry, but by how well they can sustain themselves while carrying it.

The pressures of modern legal practice are, in many ways, more complex than ever. Clients expect immediacy. Cases demand deeper specialization. Technology has blurred the boundaries between office and home. In that environment, the ability to step back, reset and maintain perspective is not a luxury, it is essential. Lawyers who invest in their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing are often better equipped to think clearly, advocate effectively and navigate the inevitable challenges of the profession with resilience.

That resilience is not accidental. It is built through deliberate, everyday choices. For some attorneys, it means protecting time for family dinners or school events. For others, it looks like early morning runs, community involvement or carving out space for interests entirely separate from the law. It may be as simple as a walk between meetings, a commitment to unplug on weekends or the willingness to ask for support when the demands of practice begin to mount. These habits, large and small, create the margin necessary to recover, refocus and return to the work with renewed clarity.

Law students are beginning to hear this message earlier in their journeys: that caring for themselves is not a distraction from their legal education, but a vital part of it. Learning how to manage stress, set boundaries and build a life alongside a career is as important as mastering doctrine or sharpening analytical skills. The habits formed now will shape not only the kind of lawyer they become, but the kind of life they lead.

In her keynote address to the class of 2026, the Hon. Erica Woodford told the graduates, "You cannot advocate for others if you do not first advocate for yourself. This profession will ask everything of you. It will ask for your nights and your weekends and your mental bandwidth and your emotional reserves. And if you give it all of that without replenishing yourself, there will be nothing left. That is not sustainable. And it is not noble. It is just empty. The legal profession needs you healthy, whole, and present. So when the exhaustion comes — and it will come — take the mental health reprieve. Step away. Breathe. Restore yourself. It is not a retreat. It is a reset and return."

The legal profession itself is increasingly embracing the idea that wellbeing is not merely a personal concern, but a professional imperative. Recognizing the significant challenges facing attorneys, including elevated rates of stress, burnout, depression, anxiety and substance use, the State Bar of Georgia established the Center for Lawyer Wellbeing in 2024. Building upon years of work by the Bar's Attorney Wellness Committee, the Center serves as a permanent hub for education, resources and advocacy focused on the health and resilience of Georgia's legal community.

Through wellness CLEs, educational programming and outreach initiatives, the Center encourages lawyers, judges, law students and legal employers to approach wellbeing proactively rather than waiting until challenges become crises. It promotes conversations surrounding mental health, work-life integration, physical and financial wellness, and continues efforts to reduce the stigma often associated with seeking help. As participation in wellness initiatives continues to grow across the profession, the message from Bar leaders is clear: taking care of oneself is not separate from being an effective lawyer, it is essential to competent, ethical and sustainable practice.

In this issue of Mercer Lawyer, we turn to alumni who are putting these ideas into practice. Across firms, courtrooms and communities, they are finding thoughtful and personal ways to integrate wellness into their professional lives, prioritizing family, staying connected to their communities and redefining what it means to succeed in the law. Their stories offer not a single blueprint, but a range of approaches to building a career that is both accomplished and sustainable, and a life that leaves room for more than just the work.

Chelsea Harris

Finding health, perspective and success beyond the office



For lawyers and law students, the demands of the profession can easily crowd out everything else. Long hours, constant deadlines and the pressure to succeed often make personal interests feel optional. But for Chelsea Harris, ’20, maintaining a life outside the law is essential, not only for happiness, but for mental and physical health.

Harris, a career staff attorney at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, is also an accomplished distance runner. Since taking up running during her final year of law school, she has completed the New York City Marathon, the Chicago Marathon, multiple ultramarathons, a 50-mile race and is currently training for a 100-mile event.

What began as a way to stay active quickly became something much more important.

“At the beginning, it was more for my physical health,” Harris said. “But now I can see the effects when I’m not running. It has become just as important for my mental health.”

Today, she runs six days a week. The routine provides structure, stress relief and a chance to disconnect from the pressures of work. As a trail runner, Harris often silences her phone and spends hours away from emails and notifications, focusing only on the miles ahead.

That separation, she believes, is critical.

“The older I get, the more I realize that we only live this one life,” she said. “Taking time to disconnect from work and focus on yourself and the things you enjoy gives you the opportunity to better your health, either physically or emotionally.”

The lesson began during law school, when Harris learned the importance of carving out small moments for herself amid demanding coursework and responsibilities. Sometimes that meant a quick run around town. Other times it meant dinner with friends or simply stepping away from campus for a short break.

Those moments were not distractions from success, they were part of it.

Running has also strengthened skills that translate directly into her legal career. Training for long-distance races requires discipline, perseverance and mental toughness. The same determination that carries a runner through difficult miles helps a lawyer navigate demanding workloads and challenging cases.

Harris encourages students and young attorneys to make their passions a priority, even when schedules feel overwhelming. Taking time to exercise, read, spend time with friends or pursue a hobby will not hinder professional growth. Instead, it helps sustain it.

For Harris, the connection is clear: when life outside the office is healthy and fulfilling, the work inside the office benefits as well. The strongest legal careers are often built by people who understand that personal well-being is not separate from professional success, it is a foundation for it.



JASON HURST PHOTOGRAPHY

Hannah Couch Hostetler

Building resilience beyond the office

In a profession that often celebrates endurance, federal prosecutor Hannah Couch Hostetler, '18, has learned that sustainability matters more than constant acceleration.

Hostetler runs three to five days a week, usually before sunrise. She began running during her second year of law school, not to compete, but to decompress and protect her health. She served on the AWLS board in 2017-18, when the Lauren Giddings 5K was initiated to provide scholarships for Bar prep. This year the race celebrated its tenth anniversary.

For Hannah, running is a deliberate counterweight to the demands of federal litigation, trial preparation, travel and the responsibility attorneys carry toward their clients.

"I don't believe work-life balance is attainable as a successful attorney," she said. "But I do believe the happiest attorneys are those who are best at triaging their professional and personal responsibilities."

That word, triage, captures her approach. Some weeks, a filing deadline or trial preparation takes priority. Other weeks, she protects time for dinner with her husband or visits with family. The goal is not a perfectly balanced day. It is making sure that, over time, work, relationships and health all receive the attention they deserve.

Hostetler does not rely on rigid rules or idealized routines. Instead, she makes practical adjustments: waking early to exercise, working through lunch to get home for dinner and using travel time efficiently so family time can remain family time.

She also treats recovery as a professional responsibility. During runs or family time, she silences work-phone notifications except calls. If she needs a deeper reset, she heads for an uphill run or a Pure Barre class where the physical challenge leaves no mental space for court filings or emails.

"Just like your body needs a break from exercising in order to improve, your brain needs a break from work to best represent your clients," she said.

The benefits extend beyond fitness. Running gives Hostetler uninterrupted time to think, process and reset. The rhythm helps clear mental clutter and sharpen concentration, allowing her to return to complex legal problems with greater focus and perspective.

It also reinforces traits she considers essential to legal practice: discipline, consistency, resilience and composure under pressure. Long-term success, she said, is built through steady effort over time, not occasional heroic sprints.

For students and young attorneys who feel there is no room for life outside work, Hostetler's advice is simple: be selective and consistent.

"Find what strengthens you mentally, physically, and/or emotionally, and commit to it."

Judge Vi Bennett

Finding harmony between law and music

For the Hon. Violet "Vi" Bennett, '81, music has never been merely a hobby. It has been a lifelong companion, a source of joy and an essential counterbalance to the demands of a legal career. From singing hymns in a small family church as a child to performing in Carnegie Hall as part of a 150-voice choir, music has repeatedly found its way back into Bennett's life, even during the busiest seasons of practicing law and now serving as a state court judge in Wayne County.

"I have always known that music would be an important part of my life," Bennett said. "It is so much a part of who I am."

Throughout her career, music often took a back seat to professional responsibilities. Law school, trial practice, opening her own firm and judicial service required sacrifices, and she frequently used vacation time for performances, competitions, and voice study. Yet she never allowed her passion to disappear completely.

"If you are lucky enough to be passionate about something in addition to the law, find a way to keep that passion," she advised. "It may not always be your primary focus, but it can be like a very good friend that has moved away. When you reconnect, it is as if no time has passed at all."

Bennett's experiences as both singer and lawyer revealed striking similarities between the two pursuits.

"The practice of law, particularly trial work, and the singing of songs is a performance, and both require preparation," she said.

Success in both arenas require adaptability, communication and the ability to connect with an audience. "A singer learns the nuances in tone, volume and rhythm to evoke emotion. A good trial lawyer does the same to persuade a jury. A good judge does the same to calm a courtroom."

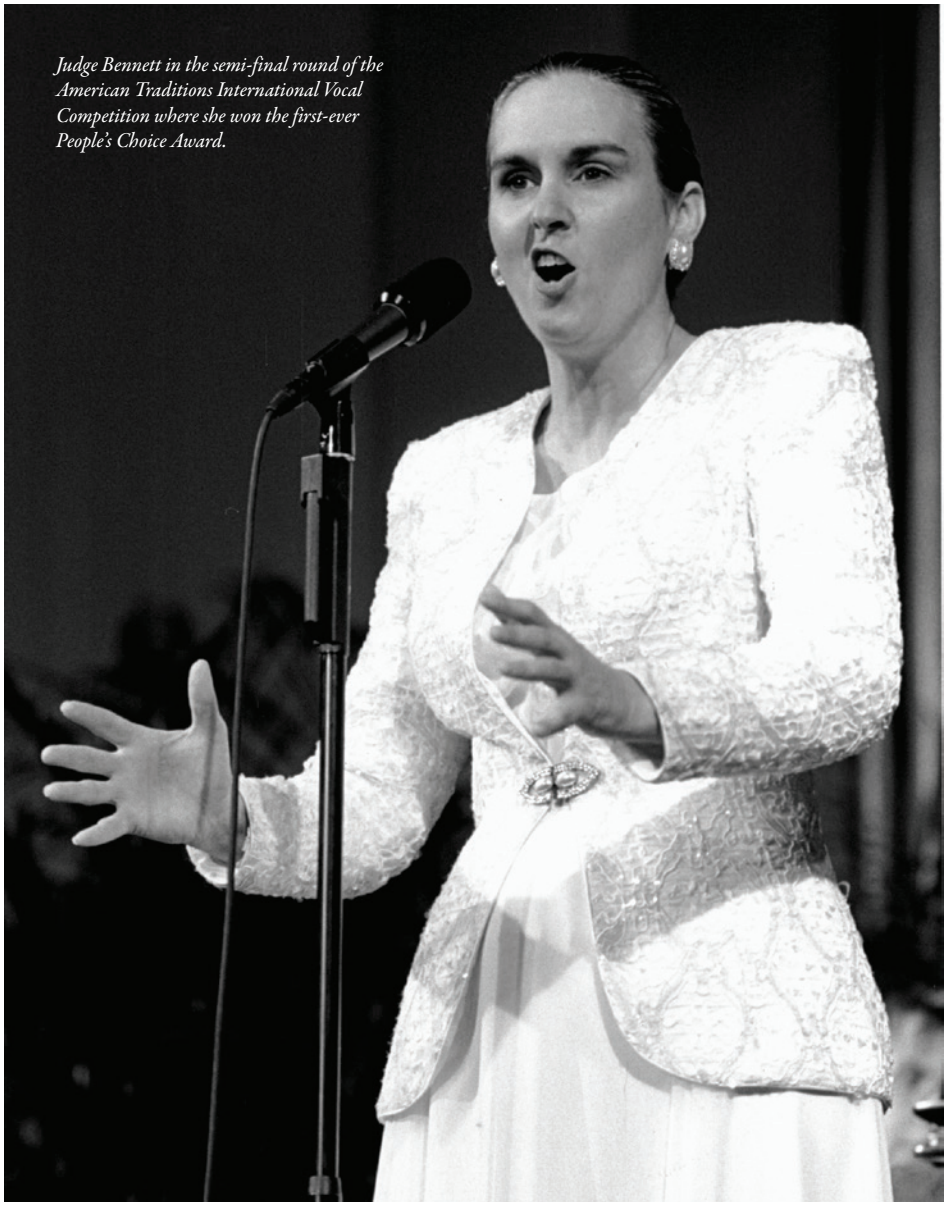
While the courtroom provides purpose, music provides something different.

"The law feeds my tummy, but music feeds my soul," Bennett often tells audiences.

For her, balance means being fully present wherever she is. Whether presiding over court, traveling with friends or performing before an audience, she focuses on the moment rather than the next obligation. That perspective has become more important with time.

"Find the time," she said. "If you do not take time for yourself and those you love and the things that bring you joy, you will suffer; your relationships will suffer, and your work will suffer."

Bennett's message to fellow lawyers is simple: make room for the things that make you happy. The work matters, but so does the life beyond it.



Judge Bennett in the semi-final round of the American Traditions International Vocal Competition where she won the first-ever People's Choice Award.

Brett Bartlett

Treating personal passions like professional commitments

For Brett Bartlett, '99, swimming began long before his legal career. He started competing around age 12, continued through college and nearly qualified for nationals before graduation. But once law school and the demands of practice took hold, the sport faded into the background.

"I didn't swim much during law school at Mercer," he said. "I swam even less after I passed the bar and began my first law firm job."

Nearly 25 years into his career, however, Bartlett found his way back to the pool.

"It wasn't until about three years ago ... that I finally got back into it," he said. "Now I'm fairly obsessed."

Today, the Seyfarth Shaw partner trains competitively with three masters swim teams, two of which include former collegiate swimmers, many considerably younger than he is. Practices are demanding, with coaches leading intense workouts from the deck.

"We push each other," he said, "racing the harder sets."

But for Bartlett, swimming is about far more than fitness or competition. It has become an essential part of maintaining perspective and longevity in a demanding profession.

"One thing that I feel I've learned over the past 27 years or so of practice is that work-life balance doesn't mean that if I work 30 or 40 hours for our clients then I must have some equal time for my life," he said. "I love what I do. My work is part of my life, and an important part of it."

At the same time, he has learned the importance of stepping away.

"If I don't take time to put my mind somewhere other than work, whether during an hour of swimming during the day or, more important, during a vacation or other time away with my family, then I lose my crispness at work," he said. "My definition of work-life balance ... means taking the time to breathe deeply, to recalibrate and to have moments to think about anything else but work."

Bartlett acknowledges that the legal profession does not always allow for perfect boundaries.

"Sometimes, boundaries are impossible," he said. Instead, he approaches personal commitments with the same discipline he brings to his clients.

"I strive to treat my personal commitments, to exercise, to my family, to the things that fascinate me personally, like I treat client commitments. I calendar them. I treat them as meetings or deadlines."

His advice to young lawyers is simple: "Persevere. Do your best to treat your passions like any other obligation, schedule appointments with yourself." And if life temporarily gets in the way? "Give yourself that grace," he said. "Make sure that you do come back. They'll be waiting."



Brett Bartlett and family



Amanda Baggett and family

Amanda Baggett

Aligning career success with family, health and purpose

For Amanda Baggett, '03, CEO of Baggett Law Personal Injury Lawyers, wellness is not about perfectly balancing every aspect of life. It is about creating a life and career that align with her values, her strengths and the people who matter most.

As a mother of four, law firm owner and active community leader, Baggett relies on structure, flexibility and intentionality.

"Some days work gets more of me, other days my family does," she said. "I try to be very intentional with my time and stay present wherever I am."

Her understanding of work-life balance has evolved significantly over the years. Early in her career at a large law firm, success meant meeting traditional expectations and earning professional milestones. After becoming a mother, however, her perspective shifted.

"Work-life balance isn't really about a job title or prestige," she said. "It's about whether the actual day-to-day demands of your work align with your personal goals and how you naturally operate."

Today, she measures success less by dividing time between work and home and more by building a professional life that fits who she is. Owning her own firm has allowed her to focus on the work she enjoys most while trusting others to excel in their own roles.

That trust is central to her wellness plan. Baggett credits her husband, who co-owns the firm, supportive family members and a talented team for making balance possible.

"No one does this alone," she said. "Having a strong support system gives you the ability to pursue excellence in multiple areas of life without feeling like you have to carry everything alone."

While she admits fully disconnecting from work can be difficult because she genuinely loves practicing law, she has learned that rest does not have to be perfect to be meaningful. Sometimes it is a vacation; other times it is simply being fully present at a child's event without checking her phone.

Physical activity also plays an important role. Running, strength training, yoga and long walks help her recharge.

"Movement is medicine," she said.

For young lawyers, Baggett emphasizes the importance of protecting joy and purpose outside the office.

"Your life outside of work is not a reward you earn when everything else is done," she said. "It's part of what makes everything else sustainable."

Ultimately, she believes a meaningful life is built not on titles, but on family, service and the legacy you leave behind.

Kiana Talton

Turning the page on work-life balance

For Kiana Talton, '20, an associate attorney at MGC, reading is more than a pastime, it's a lifelong passion that helps her stay grounded in the demands of a busy legal career. Through her monthly book club and a nightly reading routine, Talton has found that making space for a favorite hobby is one of the most meaningful ways to maintain balance and well-being.

An avid reader since childhood, Talton enjoys everything from thrillers and romance to science fiction and contemporary fiction. The variety is part of the appeal, and it's one of the reasons she treasures her book club. The group, made up primarily of members from Middle Georgia, meets once a month to discuss a shared selection, introducing one another to new authors and genres while creating a sense of community outside the workplace.

One of her favorite recent experiences came when the club read *Project Hail Mary* together and later attended the film adaptation as a group. For Talton, the discussions are just as rewarding as the books themselves. Comparing perspectives, exploring characters and sharing reactions deepens the reading experience while strengthening friendships.

That sense of connection is especially valuable in a profession known for its long hours and high expectations.

"Reading gives me an opportunity to disconnect from work and return with a fresh mindset," Talton said. "Practicing law requires a great deal of focus and problem solving, so having an outlet that I genuinely enjoy helps me recharge."

The skills developed through reading also complement her work as an attorney. Thrillers encourage careful attention to detail and analytical thinking, while character-driven novels reinforce the importance of understanding different perspectives, an essential quality when working with clients and navigating complex legal matters.

Protecting time for reading requires intention. Each evening, Talton and her husband put their phones away and spend at least an hour reading together. The simple routine has become a daily ritual that helps them unplug from constant notifications, unwind before bed and be fully present. If a demanding week leaves little time to read, she makes up for it by carving out a few hours on the weekend.

For Talton, balance isn't about perfectly dividing every day between work and personal life. Instead, it's about preserving the activities that bring fulfillment beyond a career.

"Reading isn't something I do to get away from my life," she said. "It's something I do to reconnect with myself."

Her advice to young attorneys reflects that philosophy: don't wait for life to slow down before making time for the things you love. Whether it's reading a few chapters before bed or rediscovering a childhood interest, those small moments can become lasting habits that support both personal well-being and professional success. ■



PHOTO BY ART PHOTOGRAPHY

Special thanks to Javoyne Hicks, treasurer, State Bar of Georgia, and chair of the Attorney Wellness Committee and Center for Lawyer Wellbeing for contributing to this story. The former acting district attorney and chief assistant district attorney for DeKalb County, Hicks is founder/CEO of Magnifying Synergy, LLC, an executive leadership, life and wellness coaching organization.

By Students, *For* Students

MERCER LAW FITNESS SOCIETY BUILDS A CULTURE OF WELL-BEING



Garrett Boring and Mason Olf

MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

For classmates Bryan "Mason" Olf and Garrett E. Boring, members of the Class of 2028, the idea behind the Mercer Law Fitness Society grew out of a simple realization: law school is stressful, and the pressures of the legal profession do not disappear after graduation. While Mercer University already emphasizes wellness through resources such as Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Olf and Boring saw an opportunity to focus on the connection between physical health and mental well-being.

What began as conversations among friends about healthy meals, exercise and stress management evolved into a vision for a student organization centered on wellness, community and positive coping habits. Olf said they recognized how important healthy routines had become to their own success in law school and wanted to create an environment where other students could benefit from the same support and encouragement.

The Mercer Law Fitness Society aims to provide accessible, low-pressure opportunities for students to prioritize their health. Planned activities include community walks and jogs, group gym visits, instructional workout sessions and eventually a 5K event. The organization has also reached out to local gyms in hopes of securing free day passes for students interested in trying new fitness opportunities.

Central to the organization's mission is inclusivity. Olf emphasized that the group is not focused on competition or athletic ability, but on creating a welcoming community where students can make positive lifestyle changes without embarrassment or intimidation. Working in conjunction with the Student Bar Association (SBA) and other campus organizations, the society hopes to encourage healthier habits that students can carry with them into their legal careers.

For Olf and Boring, the mission is ultimately about equipping future attorneys with healthier ways to manage stress and maintain balance in a demanding profession.

Note: The Law School Student Bar Association also supports student wellness in tangible, everyday ways by maintaining a wellness room, food pantry, student refrigerator and campus microwaves for those in need. Throughout the year, SBA partners with the Deans' Suite to organize initiatives such as Wellness Week, Bearfest and the Community Resource Fair, while bringing moments of levity and connection to campus, including a popular petting zoo during the stressful time of fall semester exams.

For more information on wellness and well-being, visit The Furman Smith Law Library's Wellbeing Nook. ■

MORE THAN A GAME

HOW INTRAMURAL SPORTS HELP MERCER LAW STUDENTS FIND BALANCE

Law school is often described as a marathon of reading assignments, case briefs, exams and constant intellectual pressure. For many students, the challenge is not simply keeping up academically but finding healthy ways to manage stress and maintain perspective. At Mercer University School of Law, intramural sports have become an important outlet for students seeking balance, connection and well-being amid the demands of legal education.

For second-year law student Joshua Frates of Commerce, athletics have always been part of his identity. A graduate of the University of Georgia with a degree in biology, Frates spent his childhood immersed in sports, competing in football, wrestling and track. Today, he continues that passion through intramural flag football and basketball while navigating law school.

"The break from the rigor of law school is more than enough motivation," Frates said. "It is just great to go play a team sport with your friends rather than talking about the Rule Against Perpetuities."

For Frates, intramurals provide something increasingly rare in the law school environment: an opportunity to temporarily disconnect from academic pressures. While he appreciates the intellectual challenges of legal education, he values the chance to step away.

"Sports allow me to temporarily forget the dense readings or looming exams and just be a person again," he said. "Playing sports and working as a team with my friends and peers is great for that."

That sentiment resonates deeply with third-year Mercer Law student Noelle Tyre of Bainbridge, who has become one of the law school's strongest advocates for intramural participation. As the former intramural chair and newly elected Student Bar Association president, Tyre has worked to encourage fellow students to get involved, whether they are lifelong athletes or simply looking for a new way to stay active.

"I've really tried to encourage students to try new sports and put themselves out there," Tyre said.

Her own involvement spans an impressive range of activities, including soccer, pickleball, dodgeball, kickball and flag football. Having participated in sports since childhood, Tyre knew she wanted to continue athletics during law school.

"Mercer offers so many different intramural sports," she said. "There is definitely something for everyone."

While the physical benefits of staying active are obvious, both students emphasize the equally important mental health advantages. Law school often demands long hours of sitting, reading and studying. Intramural sports provide a structured opportunity to move, compete and recharge.

Frates, who regularly lifts weights and runs in addition to participating in sports, describes exercise as one of his most effective stress-management tools.

"I love being in the gym," he said. "Working hard and getting a sweat in has always been a great stress relief for me."

Tyre has experienced similar benefits. She makes a point of exercising several times each week, whether through gym workouts or long walks around Mercer's campus.

"I find that taking time for myself improves not only my physical well-being but also my mental well-being," she said. "I perform better academically when I'm intentional about staying active."

Perhaps even more significant than the physical and mental benefits are the relationships built through competition. Law school can sometimes feel isolating. Students spend countless hours preparing



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

Noelle Tyre, '27, and Joshua Frates, '28

for class and often find themselves competing against one another academically. Intramural sports create a different dynamic, one centered on teamwork, friendship, and shared experiences.

"I've made some of my best friends in law school through creating intramural teams and competing together," Tyre said. "Law school can seem isolating at times. Intramurals give you a chance to work as a team and build deeper connections."

Frates agrees that the friendships formed on the field and court are among the most rewarding aspects of participation. While victories are certainly enjoyable, the memories created with teammates often matter more than the final score.

In fact, some of his favorite memories come from moments when his team struggled.

"After two losses in a row in intramural flag football, you start to question whether your time would be better spent studying Erie Doctrine a little more," he joked. "But I genuinely would not trade those moments at all."

His perspective highlights an important lesson many students learn during law school: success is not measured solely by grades or academic achievements. The experiences shared with friends and classmates often become just as meaningful.

"The studies will always be there," Frates said. "But the moments in-between make it all-the-more worthwhile."

Tyre echoes that belief. While winning remains exciting, she finds the greatest satisfaction in the camaraderie that develops among teammates.

"There's nothing better than winning a game and celebrating with your teammates," she said. "But it's really not all about that. My joy comes from spending time with the friends I've made doing something that we all enjoy."

Both students emphasize that participation is possible even within a demanding law school schedule. Games are scheduled in advance, allowing students to plan around classes and study obligations. For both Frates and Tyre, academics remain the top priority, but intramurals serve as an important complement to their education rather than a distraction from it.

Ultimately, their experiences reflect a broader truth about wellness in professional education. Success requires more than intellectual effort. It also depends on maintaining physical health, nurturing friendships and creating opportunities for joy.

For Mercer Law students like Frates and Tyre, intramural sports provide exactly that, a chance to clear the mind, strengthen the body and remember that even in the midst of one of life's most demanding challenges, there is still room to play. ■

A BANNER YEAR FOR Mercer Law Admissions



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

The admissions team: Stacey Stone, CLAS '22, M.Ed. '26, Taylor Fite, Shelby Henry and Marilyn Sutton, BUS '83, LAW '92

Mercer Law has welcomed its strongest credentialed class in the school's history. While law school applications increased nationally this year, Mercer Law outpaced the trend, increasing 12% in a single year and 23% compared with two years ago.

"This has been another banner year for law school admissions," said Marilyn Sutton, assistant dean of admissions and financial aid. "While it is true our applications surpassed the national average and the credentials are impressive, the best part of the Class of 2029 is just how remarkable these students are in so many ways. They chose us for their legal education, and we are so excited to have them join our Mercer Law community."

The numbers tell part of the story. The class's median LSAT score is 159, two points higher than last year and four points higher than two years ago. The median undergraduate GPA is 3.63.

But the numbers are only part of what makes the Class of 2029 exceptional.

This year's students bring an impressive range of experiences and accomplishments to Mercer Law. They have competed in debate and mock trial, served in student government and campus leadership roles, led fraternity and sorority organizations, competed in athletics and devoted countless hours to community service. They have volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, the Humane Society, Feeding America and other organizations. They have worked as teachers, coaches, musicians and legal interns. The class even includes a pilot and a former special agent for the IRS.

The class includes eight Mercer double Bears, including two recipients of the prestigious George Woodruff Scholarship. There are veterans, student-athletes and five Eagle Scouts. Students range in age from 20 to 46, bringing a broad range of perspectives and life experiences to the classroom.

"I enjoy reading the students' personal statements and I am always amazed how accomplished our students are before they begin their law school journey," Sutton said. "Some students are coming to law school for second careers; others are just beginning their career path. A common theme among all is their commitment to serve others and their desire to make the world a better place."

That breadth of experience is no accident. It reflects the intentional,

collaborative work of Mercer Law's admissions team: Sutton, a double Bear; Stacey Stone, director of admissions and financial aid and also a double Bear; Shelby Henry, associate director of admissions and recruitment, who came to Mercer from Western Kentucky University, where she worked in admissions first as a student and later as a graduate; and Taylor Fite, financial aid counselor and a Berry College graduate.

The admissions team conducts purposeful outreach across the country to introduce prospective students to the Law School and its community. Each year, the team participates in approximately 100 recruiting events, including graduate fairs, private visits and national LSAC forums. The office also works with pre-law advisers across the country, sharing best practices and helping prospective law students navigate the admissions process.

While many in the Class of 2029 are from Georgia and the Southeast, the class also includes students from California, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Kansas, Texas, Maryland, Minnesota and Nebraska. Political science is the most represented undergraduate major, but students also studied fields ranging from accounting to urban studies.

"We want prospective students to know from day one they can become a member of our collegial community in several different ways," Sutton said, pointing to opportunities through the Mercer Advocacy Council, clinics, externships, field placements, student-led journals, the Student Ambassador Program and the Law School's numerous student organizations.

Mercer Law hosts open houses, Law Preview Day, Admitted Students Day and the Future Mercer Lawyer Reception at Mercer Music at Capricorn. Admissions webinars are offered throughout the fall and spring, while prospective students can schedule private visits that may include attending a first-year law class, meeting a student ambassador, and talking with a faculty member. Virtual tours are also available.

"For me, this work has always been about people," Stone said. "Taking the time to get to know students, understand the experiences that brought them here and being someone they feel comfortable turning to helps foster a sense of belonging from the very beginning. Those relationships can make a meaningful difference long after the admissions process is over."

The admissions team is the first to admit that when it comes to recruiting students, they are not alone. Bringing the best students to Mercer Law is a team effort. Faculty and staff meet prospective students at events and in the hallways. The faculty admissions committee plays an import role in evaluating each application. Student ambassadors offer an inside look at life at Mercer Law. The marketing team helps tell the Mercer Law story through various means of communication. And Dean Karen Sneddon's open-door policy sends a clear message that students are welcome, valued and known.

Student Ambassador Anup Chandora, '27, said, "From my first interaction with Mercer Law at the Atlanta LSAC Forum to working in Admissions alongside Dean Sutton, Stacey Stone, Shelby Henry, and Taylor Fite, I've been fortunate to experience what makes this community so special. As a student ambassador, I love sharing my journey and showing how Mercer supports students in pursuing their passions, including my own path in patent law. Whether answering questions about housing, preparing for finals or building a professional network, I enjoy giving an authentic look at life at Mercer Law. Like the admissions team did for me as an incoming 1L, I want others to feel welcomed and excited about their next chapter at Mercer."

Attracting talented students is about more than impressive statistics. It is about building a community of future lawyers who bring different skills, abilities, interests and experiences to the profession.

"The admissions process is a collective effort that involves all of the Mercer Law faculty, staff, students and alumni," said Sneddon. "Whether attending admissions-related events, welcoming visitors to the building or emailing admitted students, each member of the Mercer Law community plays a role in the process. As a result, we are all excited to welcome our newest Mercer Law students, and we look forward to helping them become Mercer Lawyers." ■



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

Mercer Law's Entering Class of 2029 is the Highest Credentialed Class in the School's History

- 157 Number of Students in the Class
- 159 Median LSAT *(25-75th percentile 156-161)*
- 3.63 Median GPA *(25-75th percentile 3.36-3.80)*
- 47% Female, 53% Male
- 8 Double Bears
- 24 Average Age, Range 20-46
- 50 Colleges and Universities Represented
- 49 Majors Represented
- 15 States Represented

Brian Iverson

FROM ROCK STAR DREAMS TO THE CLASSROOM: IVERSON ON LAW, PRACTICE AND PURPOSE

Assistant Professor of Law Brian Iverson once wanted to be a rock star. Growing up in St. Charles, Missouri, he chased that dream with genuine enthusiasm: performing on stage, spending long hours in studios and immersing himself in contemporary music programs.

He matriculated at Belmont University in Nashville, where he pursued a bachelor of business administration while studying contemporary music performance, producing and engineering. It was during that period, recording in Ocean Way and RCA Studio B and performing for large audiences, that a Copyright Law class changed the direction of his life.

The course, taken amid the upheaval of peer-to-peer file sharing and the high-profile Napster litigation, revealed to him the compelling intersection of creativity and law. That early fascination would influence his professional path for years to come. He still plays music, now for smaller, more personal audiences, his children among them, but the law became his chosen profession.

Iverson earned his law degree from Pepperdine University Caruso School of Law in 2008 and then embarked on a 17-year career at a single firm, progressing from summer associate to equity partner. His practice focused on commercial litigation with a substantial intellectual property component, and his work produced outcomes that are cited in treatises and secondary sources. Those years in practice were formative: he learned the mechanics of litigation, developed strategic judgment and mentored junior attorneys. Yet as his practice matured, so did his curiosity about the law's underlying doctrines and policy choices, and he found increasing fulfillment in mentoring junior colleagues. Teaching offered a natural next step, an opportunity to channel his practical experience into educating future lawyers.

When the opportunity to join Mercer Law School arose, Iverson saw a place where his experience could have immediate impact. Mercer's Woodruff Curriculum, with its focus on preparing students for practice, appealed to him because it values real-world skills and situational judgment. He recalls feeling from the outset that Mercer was a setting where he could "make the biggest impact on day one." That sense has been borne out: students frequently report that exercises and discussions in his classes prepared them for assignments during summer internships, and Iverson takes particular satisfaction in those connections between classroom training and practical readiness.

Iverson's teaching style is grounded in practicality. He believes students learn most effectively when they confront authentic problems and documents rather than only abstract hypotheticals. In his Jurisdiction & Judgments course, for example, he has students analyze a Notice of Removal he filed in practice, asking them to identify deficiencies and consider the strategic choices behind drafting decisions.

In Civil Lawsuits, students draft pleadings and discovery responses, and they are pushed to think beyond mere rule compliance to the client-centered strategic considerations that shape litigation. His classroom is designed to teach doctrine while simultaneously sharpening judgment, professionalism and an appreciation for the tactical decisions that lawyers make every day.

The student body at Mercer surprised him in the best ways. After his first year, Iverson noted not just the students' academic readiness but their diverse backgrounds and interests: among them, a student who attended an



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

international boarding school in Ghana, a Michelin-starred chef, a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force, a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, and an actor with recurring roles. He encourages students to preserve those distinctive parts of themselves as they form their professional identities, believing that varied life experiences produce better problem-solvers and more thoughtful advocates.

The profession has changed since Iverson was a law student, and he points to technology as the most significant shift. As an "elder millennial," he remembers early mobile devices like Palm Treos and BlackBerries and the nascent role of the internet in practice. Today's students engage with technology more deliberately and, often, with healthy skepticism. Iverson sees that caution as beneficial: it positions students well for a future in which artificial intelligence and data tools will be increasingly common, provided they balance skepticism with openness to useful tools.

Iverson is candid about realities of firm life that students sometimes underestimate. He emphasizes that culture often matters more than prestige. While a firm can claim both, the day-to-day environment, how colleagues treat one another, whether partners know associates' families and whether teamwork is genuine, shapes long-term satisfaction. He encourages students to ask pointed questions when evaluating potential employers: speak with current associates, observe interactions in meetings and consider whether the workplace feels collaborative and sustainable, especially during periods of long hours.

The most rewarding part of his work is witnessing student growth. Iverson describes the "light bulb" moment, when a student moves from confusion to comprehension and then mastery, as the highlight of his days. He relishes guiding students through difficult concepts and watching them integrate doctrine with strategy and ethics.

Outside the classroom, Iverson and his family have embraced life in Middle Georgia. He enjoys walking in Amerson River Park, attending Mercer football games, listening to live music at Society Garden and participating in community events like the Cherry Blossom Festival. He and his wife Jessica, whom he met in law school and who now works as a mental health therapist, have three children: Janie, Jeremy and Joshua, and a miniature poodle named Mia. Jessica's work complements Iverson's interest in mentorship and well-being; together they emphasize intentionality about relationships and self-care.

Iverson's advice to students is practical and measured: decide what matters most in the season of life you're in, schedule those priorities, and protect them as you would a court date. Build small, consistent habits that sustain career longevity and treat well-being as a professional obligation, much like continuing legal education. For Iverson, the aim is to prepare lawyers who are technically adept, strategically minded, and resilient—professionals who can serve clients effectively while also living meaningful, balanced lives.

From his first ambitions on the stage to his current role shaping young lawyers, Brian Iverson brings a combination of practical experience, thoughtful teaching and a clear sense of purpose to Mercer Law School. ■

Abhaya Velmani

A VOICE FOR THE VULNERABLE: APPLYING LAW AS A TOOL FOR SERVICE

Long before Abhaya Velmani, '27, ever stepped into a courtroom or opened a casebook at Mercer Law School, the path toward advocacy was already quietly taking shape. Raised in Cary, North Carolina, Velmani understood early that meaningful work is rarely about prestige. It is about people. It is about listening carefully, showing up consistently and serving communities too often overlooked.

Now a law student at Mercer, Velmani is building a future centered on public interest law, juvenile advocacy and support for victims of domestic violence — work that demands both resilience and profound empathy.

Her journey to law school was anything but conventional. At Appalachian State University, she immersed herself in English literary studies while minoring in Spanish, later earning a master's degree in Spanish language, literature and culture. Yet even with advanced degrees in hand, she still found herself searching for a career that felt purposeful.

What she did recognize were her strengths: communication, conflict resolution, interdisciplinary thinking and leadership. Those skills — paired with a growing desire to serve others — eventually led Velmani to law school. After a gap year with AmeriCorps, she decided to trust her instincts and pursue legal training that could turn those strengths into tools for advocacy.

That instinct guided her to Mercer Law School. She had long felt drawn to rural and rural-adjacent communities, inspired by historical figures who championed underserved populations. While many of her peers planned futures in large metropolitan areas, she moved in the opposite direction.

Mercer felt like the right fit immediately — even before she ever visited campus.

Today, Velmani plans to practice in a midsize town and serve rural populations that often face limited access to legal services. Ultimately, she hopes to work in juvenile law, an area where she has already invested significant time through judicial internships in Chatham and Hall counties and through volunteer work as a Central Georgia CASA advocate.

Her commitment to vulnerable communities deepened in unexpected ways during law school.

When she first arrived at Mercer, she intentionally avoided family law, juvenile law and intimate partner violence advocacy. Because of her own experiences with family dysfunction, she believed she was the wrong fit for emotionally demanding areas of practice.

Then came a pivotal conversation with Professor Bonnie Carlson.

"Professor Carlson asked me whether I could see my personal experience as a strength and not a weakness," Velmani recalled.

That question transformed the trajectory of her legal education.

Over time, Velmani began exploring opportunities in family and domestic violence law and realized her lived experiences had given her something invaluable: the ability to understand complexity, pain and vulnerability without judgment. Rather than distancing herself from difficult realities, she found herself drawn toward the nuanced and deeply human work of advocacy.

That calling became more concrete through Mercer's Domestic



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

Violence Clinic, where she represented real clients in temporary protective order cases alongside a clinic partner. The experience challenged many of her assumptions about what it means to be a lawyer.

The clinic also taught her something even more lasting: the enormous responsibility clients place in the hands of their attorneys.

"My clients taught me that the trust they give me is a responsibility so great that I should be a little intimidated by it," she said.

For Velmani, effective advocacy is not about aggression or courtroom theatrics. It is about listening carefully and honoring the humanity of every client who walks through the door.

"Strength is not in how arrogant I can be against abusers in court," she said, "but in how deeply I listen to my clients despite my own lenses and expectations."

The work has shaped her not only as a future lawyer, but also as a person. Through difficult cases and emotionally charged situations, she has developed a deeper sense of compassion for the struggles people carry.

"The cases deepened my understanding that life is hard," she said, "and we can afford to have more mercy for one another than it seems."

That empathy extends far beyond the classroom.

Throughout law school, Velmani has remained deeply involved in organizations dedicated to service and inclusion. She has served on the executive boards of both OUTLaw and the Child Welfare & Family Law Society and currently serves as president of OUTLaw. She volunteers as a CASA advocate and participates in local outreach efforts such as preparing meals for a community refrigerator. Alongside Professor Meagan Hurley, '19, Velmani serves as an appointed member of the Law School's subcommittee of the State Bar Access to Justice Committee.

She also remains connected to the United Way of the CSRA, where she served through AmeriCorps VISTA, an experience that continues to shape her understanding of public service.

"They help me remember how deeply interdisciplinary public interest efforts are," she said.

Even amid the demands of law school, Velmani works intentionally to preserve her humanity. Rather than chasing a perfect work-life balance, she focuses on creating moments of rest and connection wherever possible.

Sometimes that means reading novels simply for pleasure — she remains committed to reading at least 30 books a year — or swimming, experimenting with recipes, playing chess or meeting friends for coffee and conversation.

Looking ahead, Velmani hopes her career contributes to reducing cycles of violence, trauma and poverty. Her goal is not simply to practice law, but to become the kind of professional whose presence helps create safer, healthier communities. She has accepted a one-year post-grad clerkship position with Presiding Judge Rodney Thompson of the Family Division of Mercer County Superior Court, Trenton, New Jersey, where she will engage with both family law and juvenile law issues

"I hope to become a professional who, by her existence and her work, shifts society to create less domestic violence," she said.

Her calling is not merely to practice law. It is to serve people with dignity, curiosity, and compassion — especially those whose voices are too often unheard. ■

Commencement



























2026

PHOTOS BY LEAH YETTER AND JESSICA GRATIGNY

May 8, 2026

143
Juris Doctor Graduates

4
JD/MBA

42
Honors Graduates

19
Legal Writing, Research and Drafting Certificates

19
Certificates in Public Service

13
States Represented

Commencement Speaker
The Hon. Erica Woodford

Algernon Sidney Sullivan Medal
Caroline Banahan Hager

George Waldo Woodruff Award of Excellence
Ashley Lane Hammond

Reynold J. Kosek, Jr. Excellence in Teaching Award
Kaleb Byars

Recent Faculty Accomplishments 2025–2026

Margie Alsbrook

A Right to Farm But No Right to Food, 104 DENVER LAW REVIEW (forthcoming 2027)

From Builders to Editors, Reimagining How We Teach Citations in the AI Era, 30 LEGAL WRITING: THE JOURNAL OF THE LEGAL WRITING INSTITUTE 269 (2026) (with Donna Eng)

Co-Chair, National Conference on AI & Legal Skills: Innovation, Impact & Integrity (2025-2027)

"Teaching Students How to Evaluate: Rhetorical Situation as Assessment Framework," 2026 Legal Writing Institute Biennial Conference

Executive Committee, Section on Agricultural and Food Law, American Association of Law Schools

Heather Baxter

President-Elect (2026-28), Legal Writing Institute (to assume presidency during 2028-30)

Bonnie Carlson

Rahimi and the Future of (the Rest of) the Protection Order Prohibition, 78 SMU LAW REVIEW 433 (2025)

Sarah Gerwig

Executive Committee, Section on Clinical Legal Education, Association of American Law Schools

Appellate counsel for Petitioner (with *Mercer Habeas Project),* Gibson v. Head, 927 S.E.2d 279 (Ga. 2026)

David Hricik

GEORGIA PRODUCTS LIABILITY LAW (2026 ed.)

AGNOR'S GEORGIA EVIDENCE (2025-2026 ed.)

GEORGIA LAW OF TORTS (2025-2026 ed.)

REMEDIES: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH (2d ed. 2025)

MASTERING CIVIL PROCEDURE (3d ed. 2025)

Meagan Hurley

Catching Up with the Constitution? Georgia Fixes Its Fatal Burden of Proof for Findings of Intellectual Disability in Capital Cases, 77 MERCER LAW REVIEW 847 (2026)

The Dangers of Denying Prosecutorial Independence: Wrongful Convictions, Official Misconduct, and Public Corruption, 55 STETSON LAW REVIEW 287 (2025)

Using Big Data to Dismantle Systemic Barriers: How Tracking Official Misconduct Can Foster Justice and Increase Accountability in the Legal System, 38 GEORGETOWN JOURNAL OF LEGAL ETHICS 455 (2025)

Appellate counsel for Petitioner (with *Mercer Habeas Project),* Gibson v. Head, 927 S.E.2d 279 (Ga. 2026) (presented oral argument before the Supreme Court of Georgia)

Officer, Executive Council, & Co-Editor of *The YLD Review*, Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia (2026-2027)

Brian Iverson

Rethinking Discovery of Corporate Data on Employee-Owned Devices, 79 BAYLOR LAW REVIEW (forthcoming 2027)

Forum Selling as a Threat to the Rule of Law, 21 FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY LAW REVIEW (forthcoming 2026)

Steve Johnson

Ordinary Meaning, Extraordinary Tools: Dictionaries, Corpora and Generative AI, Automating the Administrative State? Caution and Humility in the Use of Generative AI in Rulemaking, 11 ADMINISTRATIVE LAW REVIEW ACCORD (forthcoming 2026)

Sarah Klim

Social Media Harms and the Architecture of Free Speech, 3 GEORGE WASHINGTON JOURNAL OF LAW & TECHNOLOGY (forthcoming 2026–2027)

Ishaq Kundawala

Super-Efficient Breach in Bankruptcy: Recalibrating Remedies for Contract Rejection Damages, 42 EMORY BANKRUPTCY DEVELOPMENTS JOURNAL 199 (2026)

"Ethics of Advertising in Bankruptcy Practice," 2025 Bankruptcy Law Institute's Annual Seminar for the Middle District of Georgia

Pat Longan

Ethics in Family Law in Georgia: Selected Issues, 18 JOHN MARSHALL LAW JOURNAL 22 (2026)

Richard Gershon: How Four Friends and Colleagues Remember Him, 95 MISSISSIPPI LAW JOURNAL 749 (2026) (with John F. Cooper, Rebecca C. Morgan, and Mark R. Brown)

Technique With Ideals: An Essay on Professional Identity and Cause Lawyering, 76 MERCER LAW REVIEW 1243 (2025) (with Mark R. Brown)

"The Rule of Law and the American Dream," 2026 Henry County (Georgia) Bar Association Law Day Celebration (keynote address)

"Griffin Bell and Civil Rights," Inaugural Bell/Hollowell Lecture, Arc of Justice Foundation (2025)

Craig Senn

Cloudy Causation in Sexual Harassment Cases, 62 WAKE FOREST LAW REVIEW (forthcoming 2027)

Gary Simson

History Beckons Again: Democracy Needs Student Leaders, CYLINDR MAGAZINE, Aug. 25, 2026

A Nonpartisan Cure for a Partisan Supreme Court, CHECKS & BALANCES (Society for the Rule of Law Institute), July 7, 2026

Organizer & Moderator, "In Conversation with Judge David Tatel," 2026 Lawyers Defending American Democracy Webinar

Organizer & Moderator, "Free Speech Under Siege – Echoes of McCarthyism," 2025 Lawyers Defending American Democracy Webinar

Chair (elected) of Board of Directors, Center for Survivor Agency and Justice

Karen Sneddon

EXPERIENCING TRUSTS & ESTATES (3d ed. 2026) (with Deborah Gordon, Carla Spivack, & Alison Tait) (with accompanying Teacher's Manual)

Assessment Committee, Law School Admissions Council 2025-27)

Scott Titshaw

Adding Family Complications to Birthright Citizenship, 40 GEORGETOWN IMMIGRATION LAW JOURNAL 423 (2026)

President Trump's Birthright Citizenship Executive Order: Too Much Detail, DORF ON LAW (Mar. 27, 2026) (with Stephen Yale-Loehr)

Trump's Order on Birthright Citizenship Would Harm Millions, Including Citizens, THE HILL (Mar. 27, 2026) (with Stephen Yale-Loehr)

Pamela Wilkins

Premises Liability and Georgia Tort Reform: Five Questions, XVIII JOHN MARSHALL LAW JOURNAL (forthcoming 2026-2027) (also presented at the 2026 John Marshall Law Journal Symposium)

"Hearing from the Stakeholders: Tenure-track Hiring in Legal Writing," 2026 Biennial Conference of the Legal Writing Institute (with Lindsey Gustafson)

"Stories that Kill, Stories that Save: The Use of Gender in Capital Prosecutors' and Defenders' Narratives," 2025 Biennial Applied Legal Storytelling Conference

"Appointments Committee Leadership: The Challenges and Opportunities of Tenure-Track Hiring for Legal Writing," 2025 Association of Legal Writing Directors Biennial Conference (with Lindsey Gustafson)



Professor Kaleb Byars was honored with the Reynold J. Kosek, Jr. Excellence in Teaching Award during commencement exercises in May. The honor is awarded each year by a vote of the Law School's graduating class.



Professors Armstrong-Roudil and Alsbrook Honored with Faculty Awards

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2025 Judge Clyde Reese Board of Visitors' Awards for Excellence. Associate Professor of Law Monica Armstrong Roudil (left) is the recipient of the Judge Clyde Reese Board of Visitors' Award for Excellence in Teaching. Assistant Professor of Law Margie Alsbrook (right) is the recipient of the Judge Clyde Reese Board of Visitors' Award for Excellence in Scholarship.



Professor Ben Parrish, CLAS '78, LAW '82, is the 2026 recipient of the Manley F. Brown Distinguished Adjunct Professor Award. Parrish leads the Corporate Counsel Externship Program, which he started in 2022, teaches securities regulation and corporate governance courses and serves as chair of the Law School's Board of Visitors.



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTOS

Professor Meagan Hurley, LAW '19, was honored with the Award of Achievement for Outstanding Service to the Profession presented by the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia on Friday, June 12 at the State Bar's Annual Meeting in Amelia Island, Florida. She was also sworn in as a member of the executive council of the YLD and named co-editor of the YLD Review quarterly news publication.

[CLASS *Notes*]

Share your personal and professional news at **news@law.mercer.edu**.
Class Notes are reported from July 2025 through July 2026.

1960s

William F. "Bill" Pearce, Jr., CLAS '64, LAW '65, published two thriller/mystery novels this year with The Book Folks/Joffe Books. *Last Girl Missing* is his first novel and the first in the Jameson Guard thriller series. *Death in Florida* is the second book in the series.

1970s

Kipling Louise McVay-Stubbs, **'76**, who served as a senior judge of the Probate Courts of Georgia until December 2025, was recognized by the State Bar of Georgia in April for 50 years of service as a member of the State Bar.

The Hon. William P. "Bill" Adams, **'77**, received the Distinguished Judicial Service Award from the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia during the awards ceremony in June.

1980s

Darcee S. Siegel, '85, was elected chair-elect of the Board of Trustees of the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada.

1990s

Kellye Chaloult Moore, '93, was appointed by Gov. Brian P. Kemp to the Superior Court of the Houston Judicial Circuit. Moore is the managing partner of Walker, Hulbert, Gray, and Moore, LLP in Perry, where she has a general civil litigation practice.

Jarome E. Gautreaux, '98, received the Tradition of Excellence Award from the State Bar of Georgia at the annual meeting. The tradition of Excellence Award is one of the most prestigious honors a lawyer or judge can receive.

Jeff Harris, '99, was named a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, one of the premier legal associations in North America. Harris is a partner in the firm of Harris Lowry Manton in Savannah and is an award-winning litigator who has secured hundreds of millions of dollars in jury verdicts and settlements.

Thomas W. Huyck, CLAS '92, LAW '99, joined Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC in Holland, Michigan. Huyck brings 25 years of experience advising health systems, physician groups and hospital networks.

Thomas J. Ison Jr., '99, was elected solicitor general for Spalding County on May 19.

2000s

Charley Brown, BUS '99, LAW '02, a partner at Ballard Spahr, was named chair of Ballard Spahr's Intellectual Property Department.

Michael H. Rogers, '03, was appointed by Gov. Brian P. Kemp as district attorney for the Griffin Judicial Circuit. Rogers has successfully prosecuted misdemeanor cases and major felonies in the Superior, Juvenile, Magistrate and Probate Courts throughout the Circuit. Prior to joining the Griffin DA's Office, Rogers was in private practice in Thomaston.

LaShonda Calhoun Harris, CLAS '01, LAW '04, was appointed as Henry County Solicitor General by Gov. Brian Kemp on Feb. 26. She is the first African American to serve in this role for Henry County. Harris considers it a great honor and privilege to continue her service to the community in this new role.

Justin R. Arnold, '05, was appointed to the State Court of Sumter County by Gov. Brian Kemp. Arnold is a partner in the law firm of Arnold & Hooks, LLC, where he has served clients since 2015 in a variety of civil, criminal, probate and domestic matters throughout southwest Georgia.

Billy Joe Nelson Jr., '09, was appointed to the Superior Court of the Atlantic Judicial Circuit by Gov. Brian P. Kemp. Nelson was elected district attorney of the Atlantic Judicial Circuit in 2022 after serving as assistant district attorney since 2011.

2010s

Ronald E. "Ron" Daniels, '12, received the Ross Adams Award at the Young Lawyers Division awards ceremony in June.

Norbert "Bert" Hummel IV, '12, was elected to serve as secretary of the State Bar of Georgia and was

installed during the Annual Meeting. Hummel was also re-elected as chair of the State Disciplinary Review Board and appointed chair of the Advisory Committee on Legislation. He was honored by the Young Lawyers Division with the Ross Adams Award during the award ceremony.

Jon Wilson, '14, moved from Swift Currie's Atlanta office to serve as partner in the new Swift Currie office in Savannah. A Savannah native, Wilson represents employers, insurers, self-insureds and third-party administrators in coastal Georgia and across the state in workers' compensation defense and related matters.

James Banter, '16, was given the Award of Achievement for Service to the Bar by the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia during the annual meeting in June.

Virginia C. Josey, '16, was installed as the 80th president of the Young Lawyers Division (YLD) of the State Bar of Georgia at the annual meeting. Previously, Josey was co-editor of The YLD Review newsletter and served on the Board of Directors as secretary, treasurer and president-elect.

Timothy R. Perren, '16, joined DuVall Perren law firm in Marietta as a named partner in January. Perren focuses his practice on criminal defense.

Caleb "Cale" Davis, '17, joined Blasingame, Burch, Garrard & Ashley, P.C. as a shareholder and will practice out of Lake Oconee office. Davis will focus on real estate transactions, estate planning and probate, and business law.

Veronica Rogusky Cox, '18, senior associate general counsel at OpenText, completed her term as the 70th president of the Young Lawyers Division (YLD) of the State Bar of Georgia. Prior to her term as president, Cox co-chaired the YLD's Food Frenzy, and served on the YLD's Board of Directors as secretary, treasurer, and president-elect.

Austin Bennett, '19, received the Award of Achievement for Service to the Bar by the Young Lawyers Division during the awards ceremony in Amelia Island, Florida.

Meagan Hurley-Gantt, '19, received the Award of Achievement for Service to the Profession by the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia. The award was given at the awards ceremony during the annual meeting in Amelia Island, Florida. Hurley was also installed as co-editor of The YLD Review, the newsletter of the Young Lawyer's Division (YLD) of the State Bar of Georgia.

2020s

Mallory P. Fleming, '20, was recognized with the Award of Achievement for Service to the Public by the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia.

Nicholas Tuz, '20, was promoted to Senior Counsel at Wood, Smith, Henning, and Berman in the Atlanta office. Tuz's practice focuses on insurance coverage where he has considerable experience representing insurance companies in complex coverage disputes.

Mercer Lawyers Honored

at the State Bar's Annual Meeting in Amelia Island, Florida, on Friday, June 12.

Jarome Emile Gautreaux, '98
Tradition of Excellence Award

The following alumni were recognized at the Young Lawyers Division Awards Ceremony.

Hon. William P. "Bill" Adams, '77
Distinguished Judicial Service Award

Ronald E. "Ron" Daniels, '12
Ross Adams Award

Norbert D. "Bert" Hummel IV, '12
Ross Adams Award

James Banter, '16
Award of Achievement for Service to the Bar

Austin Bennett, '19
Award of Achievement for Service to the Bar

Mallory Flemming, '20
Award of Achievement for Service to the Public

Meagan Hurley-Gantt, '19
Award of Achievement for Service to the Profession

Class Reunions 2025–2026

If you are interested in having a class reunion, contact Andrea Williford at **(478) 301-2180** or **williford_a@mercer.edu**.



Class of 1975's 50th Reunion



Class of 2000's 25th Reunion



Class of 2015's 10th Reunion

Professionalism Day During 1L Orientation in August



Alumni, faculty, staff and friends of Mercer Law schooled the incoming Class of 2029 on the fine points of professionalism.

Alumni Award Recipients 2027

To be honored at the annual Mercer Law Alumni Dinner in Atlanta, Feb. 26, 2027



Outstanding Alumna Award
Kate Sievert Cook, '02



Meritorious Service Award
The Hon. John C. Carbo, '79



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

Young Alumnus Volunteer of the Year Award
Shannon L. Mills, '17

Mercer Law Alumni Sharing Their Time and Talent to Serve Students and the Law Community



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

Virginia Josey, '16, (center) marks the third Mercer alumni to serve as YLD president in the last four years: Veronica Cox, '18, (left) served 2025-26, and Kindall Browning-Rickle, '15, (right) has been elected to serve as president in 2027-28. Photo taken at The State Bar of Georgia reception in Amelia Island, Florida, June 2026.



MAGGIE REIMER PHOTO

During a panel discussion at 1L orientation in August, Ron Daniels '12, and the Hon. Shondeana Morris, '97, told students that though law school is demanding, there is no single "right" way to navigate its pressures. They stressed that the key is to acknowledge the challenges, normalize conversations about stress and find healthy ways to process them. Setting boundaries, they said, making time for yourself and maintaining balance are essential tools to long-term success. Every student copes differently, so it's important to discover what works best for you.

Alumni Dinner 2026

















Save *the* Date

Mercer Law Annual Alumni Dinner 2027

Friday, Feb. 26, 2027
InterContinental Buckhead, Atlanta
Find more details and updates at
law.mercer.edu/alumnidinner.















JAMIE TUCKER PHOTOS

Thank You to Our 2026 Alumni Dinner Sponsors

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Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP
Slappey & Sadd LLC

Founders Circle

Peak Wooten McDaniel & Colwell LLP
Kristie and Gregory K., '01, Smith

Barristers Circle

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

Dean's Circle

Alec and Laura, '08, Denton
Committee to Elect Judge Sara Doyle, '94
The Law Offices of Tanya D.
Jeffords and Associates, PC
McAfee Law Firm LLC
Bethany Rezek, '06
Karen J. Sneddon and
Matthew E. Silverman
Nancy F. Terrill, '78

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D'Andrea Morning-McCants, '07
The Mertens Firm
Presiding Judge M. Yvette Miller, '80,
Georgia Court of Appeals (Ret.)
Amanda M. Morejon, '17
Rizza P. O'Connor, '10, and
Daniel J., '12, O'Connor
Kevin Patrick Law Trial Attorney
Helen and Richard (Doc), '81, Schneider
Andrea Williford

If you or your firm would like to be a sponsor for the 2027 Alumni Dinner, on Feb. 26, please contact ***Andrea Williford*** *at* ***williford_a@mercer.edu*** *or* ***(478) 301-2180****.*

MERCER UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF LAW
1021 Georgia Avenue, Macon, Georgia 31207
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150 FOR ALL

The Campaign for Mercer Law

ENDS 12/31/26



Our Vision:

Access for All

We seek to expand our community outreach and pathway programs, 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

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

Help us update the Law School building 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.