



100 YEARS TOGETHER:

CALIFORNIA WESTERN'S COMMUNITY OF SERVICE

As California Western School of Law (CWSL) wraps up its centennial celebration, we are taking one last look back before heading into our second century. Among all the school's milestones, achievements, and the remarkable work of our alumni, one word stands out to sum up CWSL's legacy: **community**.

For 100 years, California Western has remained committed to two guiding principles: creating a close-knit learning environment where students feel seen and supported, and preparing those students to serve their communities through legal aid, pro bono work, and social justice advocacy. These commitments have shaped the school's identity as a place where students not only gain legal expertise but also learn to use it in service of those most in need.

A School Built for the Community

From its founding, California Western has maintained a deeply personal culture. In 1924, Leland G. Stanford founded what would become California Western School of Law, recognizing a need for accessible legal education in San Diego. He began by teaching a bar prep course at San Diego Evening High School, focusing on working adults striving to build better lives for themselves and their families.

Determined to ensure students had access to practical, real-world education, Stanford personally paid for local judges and attorneys to lecture at the school. His brother Dwight, who later became Dean, continued that dedication — going so far as to cosign \$100,000 student loans for veterans waiting for their G.I. Bill funding to arrive.

That spirit of personal investment has remained a defining feature of the school. In 1960, when Dean Robert K. Castetter took the helm, he ensured this spirit endured by cultivating what he called “a personalized atmosphere where each student felt he or she had an identity with the faculty and administration.” To this day, that sense of connection shapes the California Western student experience.



Leland G. Stanford founded what would become California Western School of Law, recognizing a need for accessible legal education in San Diego.



Leland began by teaching a bar prep course at San Diego Evening High School

Learning by Doing: The Foundation of Clinical Education

Just as important as nurturing students has been CWSL's unwavering dedication to service. From the 1960s onward, the school has equipped students with opportunities to engage directly with clients, gaining firsthand experience while making a meaningful impact in the San Diego community.

Professor John Saeger Bradway — a pioneer in clinical legal education — joined California Western in the late '50s and, under his leadership, students began participating in the Legal Aid Society in 1964. "The purpose," Professor Bradway said, "was to encourage students to see a case through the eyes of a lawyer rather than through those of a judge or legal scholar. The goal is a satisfied client rather than a gratified instructor."

Our mission remains clear — to serve people: to nurture aspiring advocates who seek to improve their own lives and their families' lives, and to uplift the community.

During the cultural shifts and civil rights movements of the 1960s and '70s, students expanded this mission, forming their own organizations dedicated to the rights of minorities, women's rights, immigrant advocacy, environmental law, criminal defense, and poverty law. These groups reinforced the school's evolving identity as a training ground for public interest work.





Expanding the School's Reach

California Western's reputation as a pillar of social justice in San Diego continued to grow in the second half of the last century. In 1972, Sandra Morris '69 cofounded Lawyers Club of San Diego with the mission to fight gender discrimination in the law and in society at large. In the 1980s, Professor Scott Ehrlich cofounded the San Diego AIDS Project and the Tom Homann Law Association, which continues to serve as a vital hub for CWSL's LGBTQ+ community.

In the years since, the school has built close connections with organizations dedicated to equity and inclusion within the legal profession, including the Earl B. Gilliam Bar Association, La Raza Lawyers Association, Pan Asian Lawyers of San Diego, and San Diego County Native American Lawyers Association, among many others. These partnerships connect students and alumni to vital professional networks and amplify efforts to empower marginalized communities.



Service in Action: Pro Bono and Social Justice

The school's commitment to public interest work deepened in the 1990s and 2000s, expanding opportunities for students to serve clients on the ground. CWSL's Pro Bono Honors Program was established in 1991, in cooperation with the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, to recognize students who volunteer at least 50 hours with local organizations serving individuals of limited means. In 2010, the Public Service Honors Society was established to recognize students who dedicate 50 or more hours at government legal offices at the city, county, state, and federal levels. Today, CWSL students collectively contribute over 10,000 pro bono and public service hours each year. At a modest rate, those hours equate to approximately \$3 million in attorney's fees.

Criminal defense advocacy became a key focus for Professors Laurence Benner and Janeen Kerper, who played pivotal roles in strengthening this commitment at CWSL. Together they cofounded the Institute for Criminal Defense Advocacy in 1991, a program dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice and ensuring effective representation for indigent clients. Reflecting on the need for stronger public defense systems, Professor Benner wrote: "Until we address the systemic problems that hinder effective representation and reduce the tremendous disparity between the resources allocated to the prosecution and the defense, we destroy the promise of our criminal justice system to truly administer equal justice."



CWSL'S Pro Bono Honors Program recognizes students who volunteer at least 50 hours with local organizations serving individuals with limited means.



Their work also laid the foundation for the Innocence and Justice Clinic (formerly known as the California Innocence Project), launched in 1999. The clinic gained national prominence in helping overturn wrongful convictions and promote criminal justice reform while giving students life-changing experiences, bringing hope to individuals and families whose lives had been shattered by a wrongful conviction. To date, students in the Innocence and Justice Clinic, alongside supervising attorneys, have been involved in the release or exoneration of over 40 wrongfully convicted clients.





Today, CWSL students collectively contribute over 10,000 pro bono and public service hours each year.





Expanding Legal Access

California Western continued its work in expanding legal access throughout the community with the launch of the Community Law Project (CLP). Founded in 2005 by Professor Linda Morton, alongside UCSD's Professor Ellen Beck, CLP provides free legal counsel to vulnerable populations in San Diego. "Nationally, there is enormous unmet legal need that a client only could afford if a lawyer provided it pro bono or low bono," said Professor Kenneth Klein, who served as the first volunteer attorney in CLP. "If you're trying to impact your community, this is the most rewarding, immediately tangible work you can do."

From 2009 to 2014, due in part to the work done by the Community Law Project, California Western School of Law was named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. In 2010, CWSL received the State Bar of California President's Pro Bono Service Award, becoming the first law school to receive the award.

Now celebrating its own 20-year anniversary, CLP is a pillar in communities throughout San Diego, serving over 1,000 indigent individuals every year. Professor Dana Sisitsky, Executive Director of CLP,

who has overseen the program's expansion, says, "Empowerment means giving people — whether they are students or vulnerable individuals — the tools and knowledge to deal with their pressing situation rather than doing it for them. The tools may be different for every person, but the goal is always to equip them to move forward with confidence."





These efforts reflected the school's fundamental ethos: to use legal knowledge — and collective compassion — as tools for resilience and restoration.

Looking Ahead

California Western's commitment to community has long included a focus on equity — expanding what it means to build a truly inclusive environment, both on campus and in the law. In 2020, President and Dean Sean Scott established the Equity, Justice, and Engagement Steering Committee, driving initiatives that address systemic inequality.

In 2022, CWSL received the largest gift in its history from Elaine Galinson and Herb Solomon, leading to the creation of the Galinson Solomon Endowed Fund for Equity and Justice. The fund supports the school's racial justice work and will prepare students to pursue meaningful change in their communities for years to come. "What's most important to us is recognizing the historical discrimination that has plagued our country," Galinson said. "Knowing that these students, if they get a

quality education, will go on to impact their families and their communities—it's a response to what we've always believed in our hearts."

For the inaugural Galinson Solomon Lecture, the school hosted ACLU President Professor Deborah Archer, who spoke about the shared responsibility of lawyers and advocates to "close the gap between the America that was promised and the America that is." Archer's call to action reinforced California Western's long-standing belief that legal education is not just about theory — it's about preparing students to make a tangible difference in people's lives.

Throughout its history, California Western's commitment to community has come into sharpest focus during difficult times. This January, when devastating wildfires swept through Los Angeles,

affecting many students, staff, and faculty members' friends, families, and colleagues, CWSL came together to offer support. Student organizations organized food and clothing drives, and the school held a public webinar featuring Professor Klein on the essential first steps for homeowners in the aftermath of disaster. These efforts reflected the school's fundamental ethos: to use legal knowledge — and collective compassion — as tools for resilience and restoration.

Over 100 years, California Western has seen the social, legal, and political landscape shift time and again and has quietly carried on fulfilling its mission. In our own time of upheaval, that mission remains clear — to serve people: to nurture aspiring advocates who seek to improve their own lives and their families' lives and to uplift the community.