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Dean's Column

BY JOHN VALERY WHITE, DEAN, UNLV BOYD SCHOOL OF LAW

NUMBERS THAT MATTER

When the *U.S. News and World Report* law school rankings were published a few weeks ago, we saw the William S. Boyd School of Law move up seven spots to 71st among ABA-accredited law schools, its highest rank ever. I've written before in this column about the inordinate attention given to *U.S. News* rankings, and the sometimes deleterious effect of that attention on legal education. But there's no denying that an improved ranking has a positive effect on our ability to continue to strengthen our student body and to attract to Nevada nationally recognized faculty and new colleagues, whom we expect to make important scholarly and public service contributions.

This year's rankings also recognized a number of our core programs that reflect our emphasis on academic rigor, professionalism, skilled representation and community service. The Lawyering Process program, which focuses on professionalism and the relationship between legal analysis and lawyering skills, is the fourth-ranked program of its kind in the country. The Saltman Center for Conflict Resolution was ranked ninth among alternative dispute resolution programs. And the Thomas & Mack Legal Clinic, in which students and faculty work together to represent families, juveniles and other underserved communities in need, is ranked 22nd among clinical programs in the country. Our part-time program, which enables Nevadans employed in full-time jobs to attend law school, is the nation's 26th-highest ranked part-time program.

As rewarding as these rankings are, what they don't measure is the law school's impact on the

local community and the state. At a time when the prospect of severe cuts to higher education budgets is very real, it's worth remembering that about one in every 10 attorneys practicing in the state attended Boyd. Each one of those Boyd graduates has participated in community service programs developed in collaboration with our community partners: Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Legal Services. These community service programs have educated and served nearly 40,000 people throughout the state and materials developed for those programs are made available to the general public on the law school's website, law.unlv.edu/free-legal-education.html. Boyd students also participate in semester-long internships in government and public service organizations.

Our faculty's contributions extend beyond the law school classroom as well. Boyd faculty members are frequent contributors to continuing legal education programs sponsored by the law school and the state bar; they serve on boards and in other capacities at public service organizations within the community; and, like Professor Chris Blakesley's work with the Clark County coroner's inquest panel, they take leadership roles in addressing issues of importance to our citizens.

We are a law school that educates Nevadans to serve Nevada. Approximately 75 percent of our students are from Nevada and more than 80 percent of our alumni practice and/or live in Nevada. Our programs introduce students to the state bar, and our students benefit from the generosity of practicing attorneys and members of the judiciary who teach at the law school,

contribute to student organizations and participate in programs sponsored by the law school. Upon graduation, Boyd students are already invested in communities around the state; they know members of the bar and realize the benefits of involvement in both community and professional organizations. Faculty and administrators work closely with local attorneys to ensure that we are cognizant of, and address, needs in the community. Law School Advisory Board members have encouraged us to explore certification programs in a number of specialties important to the profession. All of these efforts contribute to our mission of service to the state and to our goal of improving accessibility to legal services for all Nevadans.

Much depends on the outcome of the current legislative session. While we are determined to continue to strengthen existing programs and develop new ones, budget cuts of the size currently under discussion in the legislature would require us to significantly raise tuition. As a law school, we are now well-priced, for both in-state and out-of-state students. If our tuition increases dramatically as a result of cuts to higher education, more Nevada residents will look to our competitors and we would likely lose many of the strongest in-state applicants. That result would mean that fewer of these highly qualified Nevada residents will return to the state to practice.

The Boyd School of Law is now the law school of choice for Nevadans, and practice in Nevada is what appeals to these prospective students. We must ensure that we continue to attract and enroll well-qualified state residents who have a vested interest in contributing to the state at both the community and professional levels. While our move up in the rankings will no doubt increase our appeal among applicants, it will be our ability to continue to provide a reasonably priced, rigorous and innovative legal education that will ensure that those students enroll in the Boyd School of Law and remain to practice in Nevada. ■

JOHN VALERY WHITE has been dean of the William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas since 2007. White joined UNLV from Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center where he was the J. Dawson Gasquet Memorial Professor of Law. He has taught and written extensively on civil rights law. White received his J.D. from Yale Law School.