

April 30, 2010

Greetings Alumni & Friends,

U.S. News & World Report has released its 2010 rankings of top law schools, and the University of Denver Sturm College of Law was ranked number 80.

Several of our programs were nationally ranked. Our Tax Program was ranked number 12 (higher than Stanford and Columbia). Our Environmental & Natural Resources Law Program was ranked number 14 (higher than UCLA). Our Evening Division Program was ranked number 18. Our Clinic was ranked number 25. And our Legal Writing Program was ranked for the first time ever, coming in at number 19 (higher than Georgetown, Duke, and Emory). These are excellent results. And to have this number of programs top-ranked makes clear that we are a school with a wide range of quality.

Our overall ranking did not change significantly from last year. Both last year and this year, our Overall Score was 45. (The year before, it was four points worse, at 41.) Our ranking has slipped slightly from last year, when we were ranked number 77. (The year before, we were ranked number 88.) But given that last year we were tied with 8 schools at number 77, and this year we were tied with 6 schools at number 80, this change is not significant.

The lack of significant improvement in overall ranking from last year is somewhat disappointing. We improved on many of the factors that go into these rankings, and had hoped that these improvements would result in a slightly higher ranking.

However, the real take-away lesson is that significant improvement will come only with sustained effort and vision. The rankings are based in large part on objective data that is 1-2 years old. In even larger part, they rely on subjective assessments by deans and professors at other law schools and by lawyers and judges. These subjective assessments change slowly – often lagging behind demonstrated change by 5 years or more.

This means that we need to stay on our course. We have improved our school in many respects. For example, our admissions and financial aid policy have improved the composition of our class and will continue to do so, particularly as we raise more money for scholarships. These changes, as well as our bar passage program, should continue to drive up our bar passage rate. (And the current rankings do not take into account our greatly improved pass rate of the last year.) In the changing world of law practice and legal education, clinical education and legal writing programs will play an increasingly important role. Our programs in these areas are strong and getting stronger. We are hiring impressive new faculty, including faculty from top 50 schools and faculty in innovative areas. For example, this year we hired a new professor who will start one of the first transactional law clinics in the country. These moves are already attracting positive comment from peers at other law schools. Perhaps most importantly, our strategic planning process is reshaping our program of legal education in ways which we can expect to improve our reputation and the ability of our graduates to find good jobs.

So I remain optimistic and excited about our prospects. Thank you all for the role you are playing in our long term success.

Regards,



Dean and Professor of Law Martin J. Katz