Environmental Law Program Gets National Recognition

Widener University School of Law has been named to a national list of “Top Green Schools” based on the strength of Widener’s environmental law curriculum and the school’s earth-friendly practices.

The honor roll, assembled by National Jurist and preLaw magazines, gave Widener “Magna Cum Laude” status. The list is in preLaw magazine’s “Back to School” issue and in the September issue of National Jurist, its sister publication.

“We have a great story to tell here about what we are doing for students, our community activities, our teaching, and our very active scholarship, and we are very happy that these magazines recognized that story,” said Distinguished Professor John C. Dernbach, director of the school’s Environmental Law Center.

National Jurist is written for a law-school audience and is published six times a year by Cypress Magazines in San Diego, Calif. They publish preLaw four times a year for an audience largely made up of undergraduate students and those considering law school.

The magazines broke the honor roll into four tiers: summa cum laude, magna cum laude, cum laude and honorable mention. It did not rank them within each tier, instead listing them alphabetically.

Among the things they took into consideration:

- Widener Law has been teaching environmental law since 1986, when there were not yet textbooks on the subject. The faculty has been consistently ahead of the curve in this specialty – teaching climate change since 1994, for example, long before the topic was en vogue and were among the first to do so.

- The Delaware campus celebrated the 20th anniversary of its Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic in January; the Harrisburg campus launched a clinic last year with help from a generous gift by the Sierra Club.

- Widener launched the Environmental Law Center, the school’s first academic-civic initiative to operate between both law campuses, in October 2009.

- The school joined the American Bar Association – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Law Office Climate Challenge a year ago, positioning itself as a leader in the greening of U.S. law schools.

Go to http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/cypress/prelaw_backtoschool-2010/#/10 to see the coverage.
Environmental Law Center Looks at Sustainability Record of Pennsylvania Candidates for Governor and U.S. Senate

“The motto for the Environmental Law Center is Law for Sustainability,” says Distinguished Professor John C. Dernbach, adding, “Governors and Senators make a lot of decisions that create and implement law.” With that in mind, Professor Dernbach has worked closely with some of his students to provide information on the Environmental Law Center’s blog about the positions that the candidates for Governor and U.S. Senator in Pennsylvania hold on sustainability issues.

“We’ve framed the issue in terms of sustainability, which is a broader term than environmental regulation,” says Professor Dernbach. Calling the effort a public service, he noted, “Sustainable development would make Pennsylvania more livable, healthy, secure, and prosperous. Policies that promote sustainability would help grow our economy, create jobs, improve quality of life in our communities, make us healthier, reduce risks to our national security, and improve the lives of the poorest among us.” The Sustainable Pennsylvania – Election 2010 pages will provide a detailed side-by-side comparison of the sustainability positions of gubernatorial candidates Tom Corbett (R) and Dan Onorato (D). The positions of Senate candidates Joe Sestak (D) and Pat Toomey (R) are similarly compared. Categories include Green Jobs & Green Business, Investment in Environmental Infrastructure, Clean Energy, and Sustainable Communities.

Despite the importance of addressing sustainability, the Environmental Law Center’s Sustainable Pennsylvania – Election 2010 page appears to be one of the only efforts of its kind in the nation to focus on sustainability issues.

“Green business and jobs cannot be created by regulation alone. You need regulation to protect the environment and public health, but you also need tax incentives, infrastructure, and supportive laws to create green businesses and jobs,” Professor Dernbach said.

The students working on the project are all in their second year of law school--Daniel Minium (of Camp Hill, Pa.), Bret Wiest (of Fredericksburg, Pa.), and Matthew McDonnell (of Hatboro, Pa.). “They’re learning a lot and doing very good work,” Dernbach said.

Visit the Sustainable Pennsylvania-Election 2010 web page.

Professor May to Hungary to Discuss Environmental and Constitutional Rights

Professor James R. May, the H. Albert Young Constitutional Law Fellow, traveled to Hungary to speak at The Right to a Healthy Environment and the Representation of Future Generations’ Interests in the new Hungarian Constitution on Monday, February 14th.

The conference was a consultation organized by the Office of the Hungarian Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations and the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University. It was part of an overarching effort at reforming the Hungarian Constitution, but the event on Monday the 14th focused specifically on environmental rights.

Professor May’s talk, entitled "Constitutional Reformation and The Prospects of Environmental Rights for the new Hungarian Constitution," focused “On the phenomenon of constitutional environmental rights and their potential for the new Hungarian Constitution.” He also participated in a roundtable discussion.
"Constitutional Reformation and The Prospects of Environmental Rights for the new Hungarian Constitution," was an outgrowth of work conducted by Professor May and Associate Dean for Faculty Research & Development Erin Daly to explore constitutional environmental and human rights in an international context.

Professor May’s trip also included a meeting with members of the U.S. Embassy in Budapest on Monday morning to discuss a variety of environmental and constitutional issues, including climate change.

Widener Law Distinguished Professor Receives Environmental Award

Widener University School of Law is pleased to announce Professor John C. Dernbach received the 2010 award for distinguished service to the profession from the Pennsylvania Bar Association’s Environmental and Energy Law Section.

Dernbach, of Camp Hill, received the award on Earth Day, April 22, at a dinner held at the Hilton Harrisburg. The award recognizes extensive academic and professional work and scholarship in the field of environmental law and sustainable development.

Dernbach, a distinguished professor at Widener, directs the school’s Environmental Law Center, the first academic-civic initiative to operate between the Widener Law campus in Harrisburg and the school’s other campus in Wilmington, Del. Launched in October 2009, the center seeks to harness the expertise of Widener’s environmental law faculty for the benefit of students and the public. Working under the motto “Law for Sustainability” the center creates more learning and service opportunities for students and helps public and private decision makers solve legal problems relating to environment, energy and climate change.

Dernbach’s 2009 book “Agenda for a Sustainable America” is a comprehensive assessment of recent American sustainability efforts based on contributions from academic and other experts from around the country. It also contains recommendations for the next five to 10 years. Dernbach approached the project with the intention of providing a broad framework for moving the United States toward sustainability. In 2006, Dernbach coauthored a successful friend-of-the-court brief to the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of 18 prominent climate scientists in the landmark case of Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency. Another coauthor of that brief, Robert B. McKinstry Jr. of Philadelphia, was a corecipient of the 2010 distinguished service award.

Dernbach gave the keynote address March 29 at a conference on environmental justice in legal education, held at the University of Warwick Law School in the United Kingdom. His remarks were centered on sustainability and setting the agenda for legal education.

“I am honored to be recognized by this section of the Pennsylvania Bar Association,” Dernbach said. “The section’s members have known me for as long as 30 years. Climate change and sustainable development are game changing issues. My projects and teaching are a labor of love, but to be honored for this kind of work is especially rewarding.”

Dernbach teaches and writes in the areas of environmental law, property, international environmental law, climate change, and sustainability and the law. He was quoted prominently in Thomas L. Friedman’s latest book “Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution – and How it Can Renew America.” He joined the Widener Law faculty in 1993. Before that he counseled the mining and waste programs at the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and was the primary drafter of several major laws, including Pennsylvania’s recycling legislation. More recently, he was the department’s policy director.
ENVIRONMENTAL FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During the calendar year 2010, the Delaware and Harrisburg environmental faculty contributed:

- 2 books
- 4 chapters
- 15 articles
- Filed 2 Amicus Briefs
- 40 professional presentations, including 4 as keynote
- Assisted 13 professional organizations
- Were quoted or featured in 67 environmental-themed media stories, such as NPR, The New York Times, The National Jurist, and the Wilmington News Journal, and broadcasted radio/TV/internet interviews, on environmental, energy and resource matters, including with NPR, in the National Jurist, the New York Times, the Wilmington News Journal, the Delaware Edition of WHYY TV, WILM and WDEL.

Environmental Law Certificate

The Environmental Law Center offers a certificate program in environmental law on both the Delaware and Harrisburg campuses.

Students may pursue one of two tracks to satisfy requirements for the Certificate:

The Classroom Track

6 credit hours from the following Core Courses:
- Climate Change Law
- Environmental Law
- International Environmental Law
- Natural Resources Law

and 6 credit hours of additional Core Course

The Clinic Track.

Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic for 8 credit hours (or 8 hours of environmental externships approved by Environmental Law Center Director or Associate Director or a combination of the two that totals in at least 8 credit hours); and
At least 4 credit hours of courses on the Core or Elective Course listed above for the classroom track.

All Certificate students must submit a scholarly research paper on a subject, approved by the Environmental Law Center Director or Associate Director, related to environmental law and policy.

A Juris Doctor candidate must earn a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.8 in the courses required by the concentration in order to earn a Certificate in Environmental Law.

Widener University School of Law Environmental Law Center will harness the expertise of the seven environmental law faculty Widener has on two campuses to benefit both its students and the public. The faculty has a national and international reputation for teaching and scholarship on the critical environmental policy questions of the 21st century, generating more than 150 law review and scholarly articles, hundreds of presentations before national and international symposia and conferences, 25 book chapters, and eight books. These publications and presentations have broken new ground in sustainable development, environmental citizen suits, climate change, energy, international law, toxic torts, and constitutional environmental law. The Center’s credo is “law for sustainability.”

The Center’s goals include:

- Studying, making proposals for and evaluating the implementation of environmental, energy and climate-change programs in Pennsylvania and Delaware at the state and municipal levels.
- Developing, advocating for and evaluating innovative laws and legal proposals relating to the environment, energy and climate change. This will be done by putting on conferences open to the public and through faculty research and writing.
- Helping public and private decision makers solve legal problems relating to environment, energy and climate change.
- Collaborating with other higher-education institutions on environmental, energy and climate-change matters.

The Center is also intended to help Widener students engage in environmental law through coursework, externships and opportunities to work in the school’s Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic. The new center will work to ensure students are offered the appropriate courses and that they graduate prepared for careers in environmental law, energy and climate change – specialized opportunities that are expected to grow exponentially in the next decade.

The seven Widener environmental law faculty are Professors John Dernbach (Director), Jean Eggen, David Hodas, Patrick Kelly, Ken Kristl, Jim May (Associate Director), and Andrew Strauss.

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