

A Brief History of South Texas College of Law: A Look at How We Came To Be

As another fall semester begins at South Texas, it seems appropriate to take a look back at how our law school developed into the institution we attend today. The school opened to 34 students on September 14th, 1923 at the YMCA in Downtown Houston to fulfill the need for practicable legal education in the city. The law school was established to serve the working community. Classes were initially offered on a part-time basis and only at night. Later day-time classes became available and a full-time track implemented.

Originally named South Texas School of Law, students earned the LLB (bachelors of laws) degree upon graduation. The school joined the ranks of YMCA law schools. YMCA law schools sought to provide a practical, affordable and accessible legal education; values that South Texas still holds in the highest regard. At the time of the school's founding, there were twenty other YMCA law schools nationwide, including Northeastern University School of Law and Southern Methodist University.

Though many of the mission statements and curriculum frequently referenced the students of the school as men, the law school's first class included five women. At the time that South Texas was established, the University of Texas and Baylor University were the only two accredited law schools in the state.

In 1928, South Texas was awarded accreditation by the Texas Supreme Court. Graduates from accredited law schools were exempted from the bar exam requirement. Any student, upon graduation from South Texas, will be licensed to practice law.

By 1935, the provision that allowed the Texas Supreme Court to deem certain law schools' graduates ready to practice law without successfully passing the bar was repealed. Students were again subjected to the bar exam no matter what law school they had attended.

In 1964 the college moved from the YMCA to its present location. However, the school's original entrance was at 1220 Polk. South Texas' building had once been a two story car dealership. It was also occupied by an insurance company before being acquired by the college. South Texas also became the first law school in the state to offer the Juris Doctor degree.

South Texas ended its association with the Houston YMCA in 1967. Though the school was no longer a part of the YMCA, South Texas remained loyal to its original mission to provide a legal education for students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to become attorneys.

By 1968, many people began to speculate about a proposed merger with Texas A&M. Although the merger was not accomplished, it was the precursor to the present day relationship between the two institutions.

In January 1998, STCL was admitted into the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) by a unanimous vote. The year also marked the next attempt to develop a significant relationship with Texas A&M; this time in the form of an affiliation. The affiliation proposal was approved by the coordinating board; however the attorney general stepped in and enjoined the full implementation of the plan. The Texas Supreme Court upheld this injunction. Attempts by STCL and Texas A&M to affiliate, though not completely successful, have yielded a JD/MBA joint degree program with the Texas A&M Mays Business School, as well as other links between the two schools.

As South Texas has matured, it has developed successful traditions such as the Alumni Golf Tournament, the canned food drive, the softball tournament and the Alumni Gala. With these and other traditions, South Texas promotes unity and maintains relationships with Alumni. So maybe next time you are on a job interview with an Alumnus, and the conversation turns to the topic of grades, you can offer some of the aforementioned South Texas facts and traditions, instead of a GPA.

By Colin Mabrito