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THREE ALUMNI WHO BECAME DEANS



David Sanders

Dean Sylvester '94

Heads Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State

Douglas Sylvester '94, whose legal research has included the study of nanotechnology, the smallest machines ever built, is thinking a whole lot bigger as a law school dean.

Sylvester, who has taught at Arizona State University's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law for 10 years, was named the school's permanent dean in March, after serving for nearly a year as interim dean.

The new role follows upon his tenure as associate dean for faculty research and development, a position in which he worked to foster faculty scholarship, organized speaker series, mentored junior faculty and tried to increase the visibility of the law school's faculty.

"We've always known we were an amazing law school – with fantastic faculty, staff and students, but it became clear that the geographic distance between us and some other law schools was affecting perceptions about us," Sylvester says. "One consequence was that our faculty was not, in the past, invited to as many conferences and events as was warranted by their work and reputation. So we decided that we would become a destination for conferences and events."

For example, the law school hosted major national conferences on the future of legal education, involving law firm partners, federal and state judges, and academics, and on the recommended re-vamping of the use of forensic science, drawing crime lab experts, police detectives and researchers in the field from

around the world. "They were dynamic conferences," Sylvester says, "but they were also a way of letting people know of the amazing work we do here, and it has really worked. The national profile of this faculty has grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade – and so have the number of conferences and events we continue to host. The weather in winter, of course, makes that last part easy!"

Such moves have paid off not only in helping faculty to make scholarly connections, but in raising the school's profile nationally. The most recent *U.S. News & World Report* ranking puts the school at 26th nationwide among all law schools, eighth among public law schools.

"Although we don't define ourselves by our ranking and, like many, view its value with skepticism, we are extremely proud of ways in which this law school has dramatically improved over the past few years," Sylvester says. Improvements were noted in the caliber of students the school attracts, the quality of education students receive, its reputation among academic peers, the recognition among judges and lawyers around the country, and its employment track record.

Now Sylvester is in position to move the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law further forward. Founded in 1967, the law school has about 600 students and 117 full- and part-time faculty. It was renamed in honor of O'Connor, who was raised in Arizona and the first female justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, in 2006.

As he settles into his new role, Sylvester says he has discovered a few things about himself. "I've enjoyed getting out into the city and country, meeting alums; I didn't expect that would be one of my favorite parts of the job."

Even fund raising, every dean's constant burden, has come naturally, he says. Facing the reality of a hard-pressed state budget, the school is moving rapidly to-

ward the day when it will be supported entirely by tuition, alumni giving, grants and other revenue. "You look around the university and you realize there is only so much money to support an institution of this size and vibrancy," Sylvester says. "State support of the University has just dropped too far to allow every unit to retain past levels of tuition support. Every unit on campus is looking hard at itself to determine how best to handle this new economic reality. At the College of Law, we've decided that the best way for us to move forward is to reduce our state-funding to zero but, to make that work, we need to be very creative about how we replace those dollars. We've had to raise tuition – but we remain one of the least expensive schools in the country. In addition, we need to do a far better job of engaging our alumni to make the case that they need to give back to support the next generation of lawyers. That is a big job – but it's one I happily accept."

As at SUNY Buffalo Law School, the dean says, there is a sense that you will most likely end up working with your classmates someday. "We have been the only major law school within 100 miles of Phoenix for 40-plus years," Sylvester says. "The local community is greatly populated by lawyers who graduated from ASU. So the vast majority of people who go to law school with you are people you will know for the rest of your career."

"At Buffalo, you had a sense of community among the students. I also felt a sense of connection with many of my professors. I had faculty reach out to me. That is definitely the way it feels here."

Another parallel, he says, is the shared role of the public law school: "It's a sense of public service for the community in which you're embedded. Our students gave over 100,000 hours last year in free legal services to the community. That's a \$10 million free economic gift to this community."