

# UNT Dallas College of Law: The El Paso Connection

SUBMITTED BY ROYAL FURGESON, DEAN

**W**hen I accepted the position of Dean at UNT Dallas College of Law, I hoped that a few of our students entering our inaugural August 2014 class would be from El Paso. It is the City where I learned to practice law and where so many of my friends remain. One of the first things I did was to contact Lisa Soto and visit her outstanding pre-law program at U.T. El Paso. She was very supportive and put out an encouraging message to her students and the word spread.

Our law school has a unique vision and I wanted to share it with the four corners of Texas, starting with El Paso, my special home for 24 years. First, we are striving to be affordable. Our yearly tuition for our first year class is \$12,500, compared to \$23,000 for the average yearly tuition at public law schools across America. By keeping tuition at a manageable level, our goal is to keep law school debt as low as possible. At present, the average law school graduate from a public law school has a total debt of almost \$80,000. We hope to reduce that debt for our graduates.

Second, we are striving to open access to a legal education to underrepresented groups. This not only includes minorities, it also includes older students. So far, our efforts are producing optimistic demographics. The average age of our students is 33 years. Forty eight percent are minorities. Fifty two percent are women. Older students are especially attracted to our night program which has 64 students. We have 89 students in our day program.

Finally, we are striving to put in place a different instructional model. Instead of the single examination at the end of the semester, our students are being tested every two weeks. They have all recently completed a mid-term



*El Paso students who are attending UNT Dallas College of Law. Front Row, left to right: Emery Martinez, Alysia Castillo, Alexandra Huitron and Jacqueline Perez. Back Row: Philip Mijares, Jon Hoseph Huerta, Royal Furgeson, Raul Mijares and Carlos Hernandez.*

examination, with all grades in all classes being published on one day, two weeks after the completion of the tests. It is hard work on the part of the faculty and the students, but, it is worth it. And in more ways than one. Research of educational scholars has shown, for example, that regular assessments enhance learning and retention. We have other innovations in instruction, but this one is our centerpiece.

In addition to hearing from me, I wanted the El Paso Bar Association to hear from our El Paso students. I also wanted a photograph of us all, and it is included. Almost to a person, our El Paso students desire to return home. Please read what they have to say. Keep up

with them. Bring them back in the summer for clerkships. Pay close attention to them. They are outstanding in every way and will, I predict, be remarkable practitioners who will enrich the legal profession in El Paso in every way in so many years to come.

**ROYAL FURGESON** is Dean of the UNT Dallas College of Law. Prior to being appointed dean, Furgeson was for 24 years with Kemp, Smith, Hammond, and Duncan, where he headed the commercial litigation section, and then for 19 years served as a U.S. District Judge in the Western District of Texas. He was appointed dean of the UNT Dallas College of Law effective April, 2013.

## Comments of El Paso students in UNT Dallas College of Law

“The feeling I get by being able to make an immediate impact through our community engagement program at UNT Dallas College of Law, is priceless. As a first year law student I am able to gain experience and make a positive impact in the community from day one.”

**Raul Mijares**

“I’m so grateful to be a part of such an innovative law school and to be able to share this experience with fellow El Pasoans. I hope that we can all use our future skills to make a positive impact in our hometown.”

**Carlos Hernandez**

“ I felt an immediate sense of camaraderie with fellow members of the inaugural class, which has endured throughout our first semester. The UNT Dallas College of Law offers a high quality legal education to a diverse group of individuals of all ages, races, orientations, and experiences. I was impressed with the law school’s world-class facilities, first-rate faculty members, and dedication to the principle of empowering underrepresented communities by reducing the legal justice gap.”

**Adam Greenup**

“ I was born and raised in El Paso and I am a graduate of Eastwood High School. I attended University of North Texas where I double majored in Radio/Television/Film, and History. After UNT I began work with the Delgado, Acosta Law Firm in El Paso, TX, and worked with the taxing entities of El Paso in collecting delinquent property taxes. Working at Delgado, Acosta inspired me to apply to law school so that I may one day help my community.

My experiences at the UNT Dallas College of Law have been great. Law school is as challenging as I expected it to be. Thankfully I feel like I have a whole school system behind me; rooting for me to do well in all of my classes. The professors at UNT Dallas College of Law really want their students to succeed. Frequently, I will see Dean Ferguson in the school’s hallways giving us words of encouragement.

UNT Dallas College of Law is a very welcoming learning environment. Every Friday I meet with my mentor through the Louis A. Bedford Jr. Mentorship Program. It’s nice to be able to talk to someone about how we’re doing in law school and what we can expect when we graduate and begin to practice.

It is a pleasure to go school at UNT Dallas College of Law. UNT Dallas College of Law not only wants its law students to be skilled attorneys, but they also want us to go out and change our communities for the better. I hope to take everything I learn from UNT Dallas College of Law and go back to help the El Paso community.”

**-Jacqueline Perez**

“ UNT Dallas College of Law is providing me a legal education that is unmatched. UNT Law has a leadership team that is fully committed to the student’s academic and career success.

I am a graduate of Cathedral High School, UTEP College of Business, and the University of Phoenix, El Paso, MBA. El Paso is my home I look forward to the day I return to the Sun City as a practicing attorney. UNTD law is preparing me for that day.

At UNTD Law my courses are taught by some of the best legal professors in the nation. My two favorite classes are Contracts and Torts. David Epstein and Ellen Pryor keep me on the edge of my seat, ready for every word they have to offer. I am forever grateful to Dean Royal Furgeson and his leadership team for all the tireless work they are contributing to ensure UNT Dallas College of Law is a success.

I welcome anybody interested in applying to UNTD Law to contact me. I am eager explain in detail why our law school is a great place to learn. 915-274-2576 – PhilipMijares@Mylaw.untDallas.edu”

**-Philip Mijares**

“ I was born and raised in El Paso and graduated in 2004 from El Paso High School. I attended the University of Texas at Austin and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English. I then attended the University of North Texas, in Denton, and completed a second degree in Home Furnishings Merchandising. Attending law school has been a personal goal of mine since I was a young girl.”

“I chose to attend The University of North Texas Dallas College of Law because of the hands-on practical approach they are utilizing in their course instruction. The goal of the school is to graduate students who are prepared to enter the legal profession with practical experience ready to begin their legal career. This approach appealed to me as I had heard from many of my friends who are practicing law that they were not prepared from a practical standpoint for their first legal position.

Another aspect that I felt was important in my decision to attend UNT Dallas College of Law was the community service requirement of the law school. First year students are assigned a community engagement and are required to volunteer five hours a month. Having previously volunteered with the Junior League of Dallas, Inc., I understand the importance and the need for volunteers in the Dallas community.

The affordable cost of tuition was also a factor in my decision to attend UNT Dallas College of Law. I wanted to make sure that I could manage the cost of tuition without having to take out large student loans.”

**-Emory Martinez**

“ During my tour of UNT Dallas College of Law, I took notice of the vibrant Main Street District (the law school is located in the Main Street District) and the law schools proximity to the courthouses in Downtown Dallas.

I had the pleasure of meeting the entire staff along with Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Ellen Pryor and Dean Royal Furgeson. I was honored Dean Furgeson was eager to speak to me. We sat down in his office and talked about my desire to enroll in law school and what I expect out of the experience. During my other law school visits – ten to be specific – I met with only one other Dean. From the very beginning, I was welcomed and treated like a human being. Law schools tend to have a stigma of treating their students merely as a number. That has never been an issue during my three months at UNT Dallas College of Law.

My three months in law school have been challenging and rewarding. I have been placed in the Dallas Public Defenders Office and I am getting real-world experience while in law school. I have had the opportunity to review motions and participate in the intake process of clients. UNT Dallas College of Law has made this possible and I am grateful to be part of the inaugural class.”

**-Jon Joseph Huerta**

“From the very beginning, I knew that UNT Dallas College of Law is the best place to start my journey towards helping people. I believe in their vision of tomorrow’s lawyers, lawyers that are diverse and have walked different paths. Becoming a law student at UNT has been an amazing experience. UNT is teaching me how to think critically, this is important because I want to be the best attorney for the people I will be representing. I dream of one day returning to serve El Paso, the community that has given me so much.

Life has taught me how important it is to be there for one another. I am confident that UNT Dallas College of Law is teaching me how to give a voice to those in need.”

**-Alexandra Huitron**

“When I left El Paso for college I moved to the DFW area but I had always had dreams of attending law school. Having 7 other siblings and the reality of their needs to attend college, I knew my parents would not be able to help me pay for law school, just as they were hardly able to help put me through my undergraduate studies. The decision between massive loans or finding a new career path was a very real issue for me until a professor suggested I meet with a Dean from a brand new law school opening in Dallas: UNT Dallas College of Law.

Seven months later, I am very proud to be in law school and be part of the inaugural class of UNTD College of Law. My professors have taken the time to learn my name and always stop me in the hall to ask if I need any help. I have been blessed to attend a school that focuses on developing me as a person through community engagement activities and mentoring group programs. Attending UNTD College of Law has, so far, has been an experience I am fully appreciating. “

**-Alysia Castillo**

## Texas Legal Protection Plan Changes Name to Texas Legal

Texas Legal, founded by the State Bar of Texas and the Texas Legislature in 1972, offers comprehensive legal coverage for every stage in life such as adoptions, divorces and estate planning. The company was formerly known as “Texas Legal Protection Plan.” Membership covers legal expenses much like health insurance covers medical expenses. A low monthly fee gives members access to a network of attorneys throughout the state.

“Texas Legal provides Texans an affordable way to pay for most legal issues,” James “Jim” Buck, president of Texas Legal, said. “Hiring an attorney or having funds readily available when an attorney is needed is a challenging task for most consumers. We help Texans get the legal help they need and make the process easy for them.”

According to a study conducted by the Research Intelligence Group, 58 million Americans sought an attorney during 2012, and 110 million have sought legal counsel at least once in their lives. This underscores the importance of having a legal plan in place to help consumers remove the uncertainty about seeking legal services.

Texas Legal provides legal insurance for



companies, groups and individuals throughout the state. It is the only nonprofit legal insurance company in Texas that offers plans for individuals who are not part of a group plan.

The policy for one year for a family costs about the same as one hour of an attorney’s time and can be used for a wide variety of legal issues, including estate planning, adoptions, divorce, foreclosure, identity theft, traffic tickets, bankruptcy and more. The member can choose his/her attorney from a network of attorneys across the state and can use different attorneys depending on the issue they

### *Company Provides Legal Insurance for Routine Needs to Unexpected Events*

are facing. Texas Legal members also have unlimited access to a free legal hotline.

To learn more about Texas Legal or to become a member, please visit [www.texaslegal.org](http://www.texaslegal.org).

#### **About Texas Legal**

Formerly known as Texas Legal Protection Plan, Texas Legal is a statewide, nonprofit legal insurance plan that was founded by the State Bar of Texas and the Texas Legislature in 1972 as an effort to better serve the legal needs of Texans. Texas Legal is the preferred provider of the State Bar of Texas. The nonprofit offers plans for companies, group and individuals. For more information, please visit [www.texaslegal.org](http://www.texaslegal.org).