

# In Texas, One Go-To Law School Dominates the Rest

Karen Sloan, The National Law Journal

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They say that everything is bigger in Texas. So, apparently, is the University of Texas School of Law's influence on the state's law firms.

The school is a pipeline into Big Law — more than 32 percent of its 2014 graduates landed associate jobs among the largest 250 law firms in the country, giving it the No. 16 spot on *The National Law Journal's* 2015 Go-To Law Schools list.

But Texas Law also excels in producing future law firm partners. It had the fifth-highest number of alumni promoted to partner in 2014, according to data reported to the NLJ by the country's largest firms. With 27 alumni making partner, Texas ranked behind only Harvard Law School, Georgetown University Law Center, New York University School of Law and the University of Michigan Law School.



“When you look at our management committee, I’d say about two-thirds of us went to Texas,” said John Wander (left), managing partner of Vinson & Elkins’ Dallas office. “I’d say that’s true for many of the Texas firms. There is a strong U.T. bias in the partnership ranks.”

Texas Law is a prime example of a highly regarded public law school with a strong in-



fluence on regional law firms as well as government and other leadership positions. (The NLJ reported on Jan. 19 that the law school has the third-highest number of alumni serving in Congress.)

“We are one of the biggest and best pipelines for people practicing law in Texas, as well as those involved in government,” said Christopher Roberts, the law school’s executive director for communications. “Preparing students for practice in Big Law is one of the things we do well, but it’s not the only thing we do.”

Among the 10 largest law firms in the state, as identified by NLJ affiliate *Texas Lawyer*, Texas Law alumni comprise half of the managing partners. It would have been six, but long-time Haynes and Boone managing partner Terry Conner stepped aside at the end of 2014 to make way for Timothy Powers, a graduate of Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law.

Several factors contribute to Texas Law’s

success. For one thing, state law requires that at least 65 percent of the law school's students must be Texas residents. That means a strong contingent of Texans who are more likely to pursue legal careers in the state.

By contrast, Michigan residents make up about 21 percent of the student body at the University of Michigan Law School — another prestigious and competitive public law school. Texas Law's relatively low tuition — \$33,162 in 2014 — also draws highly qualified students.

"UT is consistently ranked as providing the best return on investment of any top-tier law school," said Linda Addison, an alumna who is U.S. managing partner of Norton Rose Fulbright. "That enables the school to attract a lot of extraordinarily talented young people who could have gone to law school anywhere in America. Many possess outstanding leadership ability and have historically ended up at high places in the profession. Law firms understand that the top students at Texas are as good as the top students at any law school in the country."

At No. 15, Texas Law is the highest ranked of the state's nine law schools, according to *U.S. News & World Report*. (The state's newest law school, the University of North Texas Dallas College of Law, opened in 2014 and is not yet ranked by *U.S. News*.) Southern Methodist University is its closest in-state competition, at No. 42.

But Texas Law is the only local school with a strong recruiting profile statewide, Wander said.

Other schools tend to be strong in a particular market — such as SMU in Dallas — he said.

Moreover, Texas Law in 2014 produced the second-largest graduating class in the state at 351, supplying more lawyers than any competitor with the exception of South Texas College of Law in Houston.

Texas is the fifth-largest legal market in the United States, according to the *NLJ* 350 regional report, behind only New York, California, the District of Columbia and Illinois. The state has not one but two major legal centers, in Houston and Dallas. Plenty of national law firms have large offices in Texas. There is substantial demand for associate talent.

A strong alumni network gives Texas alumni a leg up in getting hired and climbing the ranks to partner, Wander said. Texas Law connections are useful outside the firm, as well.

"Longhorn football weekends are a big deal in Austin," Wander said. "Not surprisingly, we have a lot of clients who are diehard fans. Our lawyers with U.T. connections, at all levels, travel to Austin and entertain clients on those weekends, establishing bonds with each other and with the clients."

In short, there is strength in numbers.

Baker Botts, another large firm with Texas roots, employs 120 Texas Law alumni, according to the firm's website. More than 100 operate out of Texas offices — further evidence that Texas graduates tend to stick around.

Similarly, 75 of the 344 lawyers in Andrews Kurth's Texas offices graduated from Texas Law, compared to 32 from SMU. "I think at U.T. you see a deep talent pool of people who want to stay in Texas," Wander said.

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