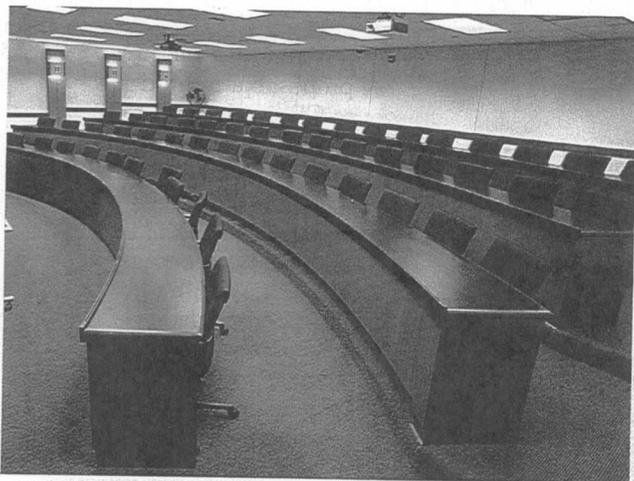


# Irvine by Erwin



Can a top legal academic create a law school that is both innovative and elite?

BY RACHEL M. ZAHORSKY



Twin concrete buildings stand in the blazing Orange County sun at the corner of Campus and East Peltason drives. A white steel staircase zigzags between their four levels, lacing the structures together. They blend in with the modern architectural style of Southern California—functional, but hardly impressive.

A dark gray Toyota Prius—California license plate UCI Law 1—is parked out front. The windshield has a small, star-shaped crack on the passenger side that's been there for some time. The gray, cloth interior could use a good detailing. The owner has had bigger things on his mind.

Erwin Chemerinsky—the sometime U.S. Supreme Court advocate and nation's most-cited full-time legal academic—is eager to talk about his “next big thing”: an attempt to create the first top-tier American law school to be founded in more than 50 years. As if that weren't an audacious enough goal, it's designed to be among the most innovative law schools in the nation.

So far, it's been a journey with both ups and

The law school, with its tiered classrooms, will open this month to its inaugural class of 65—all of whom are getting full-tuition scholarships.





downs, and one that almost ended before it began.

In 2007, in the space of a week, Chemerinsky was hired, then fired, by University of California at Irvine Chancellor Michael Drake.

Chemerinsky, then a constitutional law professor at Duke University, said it was because of his liberal political opinions, which are frequently on view in op-eds and the kinds of cases he litigates.

Drake denied politics played a part, or that he was pressured to dump the professor by leaders in conservative Orange County. But he did say, "We must ensure that our broader goals are not overshadowed by issues, personalities and polarization."

After almost a month of headlines, including a *New York Times* op-ed supporting the professor, Chemerinsky was rehired.

Since then, he's raided some of the country's elite law schools for faculty, including sister school Boalt Hall at UC Berkeley and his former employer, Duke.

It's a well-regarded group, ranking 10th in the nation in "scholarly impact," based on the average number of times its members' articles have been cited in law reviews, according to a study by the blog Brian Leiter's Law School Reports.

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The initial funding proposal presented to Chemerinsky for the law school at UC Irvine was wildly under budget, he says. "I would have had to take a 50 percent pay cut," he says, "and the offered salaries of senior professors were less than the average for most starting professors."

More money was appropriated by the university for the school's operations, including full-tuition scholarships for its inaugural class of 65. That's expected to cost the school \$6 million over the course of its first three years.

Still more cash was needed to gut the two existing buildings the school will occupy, creating tiered classrooms, better faculty offices and a reinforced floor system capable of supporting the weight of the library books necessary for ABA accreditation.

#### READY, SET ...

WITH ITS FIRST CLASS—WHICH HAS A MEDIAN GPA of 3.65 and a median LSAT score of 167—descending on campus this month, the 56-year-old Chemerinsky's ambition is about to be put to the test. Can UC Irvine be both among the best law schools and among the most innovative?

If not, it will not be for lack of trying. "There isn't a need for another law school that replicates the others that are there," Chemerinsky says. "We have the wonderful benefit of a blank slate and the chance to create the ideal law school for the 21st century."

UC Irvine will include an interdisciplinary curriculum and a mandatory semester in one of the planned eight law clinics. Students will be required to conduct intake interviews for legal aid clients and to study international law in the first year—a subject that is merely optional in the upper classes at most schools.