

History of Seton Hall Law School

Founded in 1856 by Bishop James Roosevelt Bayley and named in honor of his aunt, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton—the first American-born saint—Seton Hall University has long been dedicated to education rooted in public service, intellectual rigor, and ethical leadership. Today, the University comprises seven colleges across three campuses, including the Seton Hall University School of Law, a cornerstone of the institution's professional and civic mission.

Seton Hall's aspiration to establish a law school dates back to 1937. That vision became a reality in 1951, amid significant changes in legal education, when the University founded the School of Law following the closure of John Marshall Law School in Jersey City. With the transfer of John Marshall's library and assets, Seton Hall Law opened its doors on February 5, 1951, under the leadership of Miriam T. Rooney. Dean Rooney made history as the first woman dean of an ABA-accredited law school, setting a powerful precedent for excellence and inclusion. Under her stewardship, the Law School grew rapidly, relocated to Newark in 1951, graduated its first class in 1954, achieved full ABA accreditation in 1955, and gained membership in the Association of American Law Schools in 1959.

Throughout its early decades, Seton Hall Law developed a reputation for access and opportunity, educating generations of first-generation students, working professionals, and veterans. The Law School expanded its academic offerings, including the establishment of an evening program, and fostered a vibrant student culture marked by the creation of the Student Bar Association, Law Review, and the student newspaper, *Res Ipsa Loquitur*. By the early 1970s, enrollment had grown substantially, reflecting the Law School's increasing prominence.

A period of significant institutional development followed under successive deans, including John F.X. Irving and Reverend Daniel A. Degnan. During this era, the Law School expanded its faculty, improved its physical facilities, and deepened its commitment to community engagement. Signature pipeline and access initiatives—including the Summer Institute for Pre-Legal Studies and the Legal Education Opportunity Program—were launched, helping thousands of students enter the legal profession and producing distinguished alumni who now serve as leaders in government, the judiciary, and private practice.

Beginning in the 1980s, Seton Hall Law's national scholarly reputation grew. Faculty recruitment and programmatic expansion strengthened the school's academic profile, while its institutional commitment to Newark became a defining feature of its identity. Under Dean Ronald J. Riccio's leadership, the Law School obtained financing for and began construction of its current \$37 million facility located in the heart of Newark's business district. Dean Riccio's efforts were instrumental in supporting Newark's revitalization, securing federal funding for key initiatives, and establishing the Center for Social Justice, which remains the home of the Law School's nationally recognized clinical programs.

During this period, Seton Hall Law also emerged as a leader in specialized and interdisciplinary legal education. The Center for Health & Pharmaceutical Law achieved national distinction and consistently earned top rankings from *U.S. News & World Report*. The Law School launched innovative graduate degrees, including the LL.M. and the Master of Legal Studies, as well as week-long compliance training programs, serving professionals in health care, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology. Its graduates increasingly assumed leadership roles across the profession, including appointments to state and federal courts.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, under the leadership of Dean Patrick E. Hobbs, the Law School further strengthened its ties to the bench, bar, and alumni through the creation of the Board of Visitors and the establishment of endowed chairs and institutes, including the Gibbons Institute for Law, Science & Technology. New academic programs, experiential learning opportunities, international partnerships, and high-impact initiatives—such as the Last Chance Exoneration Project and the Leadership Fellows Program—reinforced the School’s commitment to justice, innovation, and professional excellence. Alumni achievements during this period included service at the highest levels of state and federal government.

In 2015, Kathleen M. Boozang was named Dean of the Law School, ushering in a new period of innovation and resilience. The Law School became a national leader in hybrid and online legal education with the launch of one of the country’s first weekend part-time J.D. programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Seton Hall Law distinguished itself by maintaining uninterrupted instruction while expanding access and support for students. Significant investments in facilities, faculty, student success, and community-based programming further strengthened the institution, alongside the establishment of new initiatives in privacy law, bar preparation and trial advocacy, including the Denis McLaughlin Trial Advocacy Workshop.

By the conclusion of Dean Boozang’s tenure, Seton Hall Law had earned national recognition for bar passage, employment outcomes, and academic quality, achieving a top-tier national ranking and distinction for its part-time program. In July 2024, Ronald H. Weich, J.D., assumed the role of the Law School’s ninth dean, building upon a legacy of service, innovation, and excellence as Seton Hall Law looks toward continued growth and impact in the years ahead.