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## Academic Credit

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SANTA CLARA -- Kavya Mohankumar was a college student in India when she started looking at law schools in the United States.

One school in particular caught the 26-year-old's interest: Santa Clara University School of Law. Mohankumar said she was attracted to Santa Clara's intellectual property law specialty and international flavor.

Mohankumar will need to take advantage of both attributes: She plans to work as a lawyer in the United States and perhaps later return to practice in India.

"There is such a diverse student body ... There are a lot of Indians, Mexicans and Southeast Asians," the second-year law student said. Diverse backgrounds fuel thoughtful conversations and classroom debates because "people bring different perceptions," to their interpretations of the law, she said.

During the past few years, Santa Clara has crept up into the second tier of law schools. According to U.S. News and World Report, its ranking sits at 94. In the same period, applications have surged. The school received 2,693 in 2000, and 5,288 this year -- for 250 slots.

While these statistics aren't enough to place Santa Clara alongside heavyweights such as Stanford Law School and Boalt Hall School of Law, the change has been enough to raise eyebrows. Santa Clara measures up to the elite with an IP program consistently ranked among the top 10 nationally, and it is starting to build a reputation in other fields as well.

Along with offering a master's of law in intellectual property, the school is forging ahead in the fields of social justice and international law, where it also offers an LL.M. Students didn't just intern at law firms this summer; some worked at war crimes tribunals in The Hague and Rwanda.

The Jesuit school was previously known as a training ground for government lawyers, and a large percentage of Santa Clara's bench also attended the school. But the school is pushing beyond being a feeder school for the South Bay legal community, and the shift reflects a changing mission. Santa Clara wants to produce lawyers who are as comfortable on an international stage or in a Silicon Valley boardroom as they are in the local courthouse.

The man leading the charge is Dean Donald Polden, an affable workplace law expert who arrived last year from the University of Memphis School of Law, where he was also dean. He says he was drawn here, in part, by the warm weather and the Bay Area's reputation as an academic hub.

"Our school has evolved, and the program has changed," Polden, 56, said during a recent interview in his office on the spacious 100-acre campus. "We are definitely heading in the right direction."

In his first year on the job, Polden attended 30 alumni fund-raising events in 17 cities -- and even flew overseas to talk to graduates in Seoul, South Korea. He is intent on moving the law school into new quarters and boosting funding, and he wants to continue to maintain close ties with the school's alumni.

Polden's efforts are luring more and more students. Third-year law student Sia Korovilas said she was drawn by the

school's reputation in high-tech law.

"Usually law schools which acquire a national reputation in one area tend to develop national reputations in more areas," said Korovilas.

"[Santa Clara] has strong future potential in climbing the ranking chart," she said.

### **BEEFING UP THE FACULTY**

A strong faculty has been key to the transformation.

The school has attracted and retained top-notch teachers like Gerald Uelman, a nationally known criminal law expert who served on O.J. Simpson's defense team. Uelman served as dean from 1986 to 1994. Renowned patent expert Donald Chisum, who is also of counsel at Morrison & Foerster, anchors the IP program and is the author of the authoritative treatise "Chisum on Patents."

More recently, Santa Clara lured Stephanie Wildman away from Berkeley, where she directed Boalt's Center for Social Justice. She now directs the Center for Social Justice and Public Service at Santa Clara. Wildman also taught for 25 years at the University of San Francisco School of Law.

Other recent hires include Beth Van Schaack, who worked at the international criminal tribunal for war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and was an attorney with MoFo from 1999 to 2002.

In addition, Larry Sonsini of Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati is on the school's board of directors. Activist Kathleen "Cookie" Ridolfi heads the school's Innocence Project and teaches criminal law, and death penalty expert Ellen Kreitzberg is an associate professor.

"I had my eye on this place for a long time," said Van Schaack. "They have a commitment to international law. I've been able to expand my own interests and research."

Van Schaack teaches a popular course on international criminal law, and last semester she offered a course on "transitional justice." The class examined how countries, including Iraq, handle war crimes after transforming from authoritarian regimes to democracies.

"We produce lawyers who are highly intelligent, well trained and able to get great jobs, and we're increasingly doing that internationally," Van Schaack said.

Van Schaack said Santa Clara's biggest asset is the school's focus on teaching and building a strong legal community. Students often return two or three years after graduation to ask professors for advice on their careers, she said.

Constitutional law professor Edward Steinman said the school hasn't changed much -- it's just that more people value an emphasis on practice instead of theory.

"The school is more concerned with creating practical lawyers than the ethereal approach of big-name law schools," said Steinman, a noted civil rights and poverty law attorney. "Santa Clara is perceived locally and nationally as producing grounded students."

Polden has tried to make the school a lure for faculty like Van Schaack. He said the location and the school's up-and-coming reputation help.

"You get to be in a vibrant part of the United States, and faculty are coming to a place where they can collaborate because they have connections with other programs and schools," he said.

Polden added that California's active legal community and judiciary are also a draw.

"Not all new case law is developed here, but this is probably the most active court system in the States," he said.

### **STUDENTS, GOALS CHANGED**

On a recent afternoon, students of all ages and ethnicities walked around the classically decorated law school buildings or waited for professors. Even on an otherwise slow August day, the halls were bustling.

Students tend to be tightknit, enthusiastic and hard working, professors say. If Santa Clara students have any problem, one professor said, it's that they get so involved in law school activities that they sometimes shortchange

other priorities.

Increasingly, students are ending up on Wall Street and in big-name law firms. But Polden said Santa Clara hasn't lost sight of its history as a California law school, and the school continues to stock the local legal community with lawyers.

Santa Clara is not competing with the Boalts and Stanfords of the world, Polden said. Rather, the school wants to stand out in a group including UC-Davis, Hastings and the University of San Francisco while enticing more of "the best and the brightest" with attractive financial packages and a low student-to-teacher ratio.

"[Students] have a sense that this is not a large state university," Polden said. "You can easily get in to see faculty if you have a problem. Students view the school as one that nourishes their interest in a variety of career paths."

Carlos Martinez, a 2004 graduate, said that it was as tough for him to meet with his professors as it was for his friends at other law schools. But he did say his experience with colleagues and professors was more "collegial."

"Even with competition among students, there was always someone willing to help you," Martinez said. "I know lots of people who had 2Ls and 3Ls helping them get through that first year. I studied with a lot of people who wanted to learn versus wanting to be number one."

### **BROAD BACKGROUNDS**

With a broader focus, the school has attracted students with a wider range of backgrounds and interests. Almost half of the new recruits come from minority groups.

Unlike many other Bay Area law schools, Santa Clara holds night classes for students with full-time jobs or families. It also tries to recruit students with interests other than making partner before age 35.

David Wong, another 2004 graduate, chose Santa Clara so he could be close to his family while pursuing his musical interests.

In between marathon study sessions during his second year of law school, Wong was selected to teach a master piano class at Humboldt State University. He also performed at Santa Clara.

"Not only did I receive a great legal education, but I also made tremendous progress as a pianist," he said.