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# Chemerinsky Named Law Dean at UC Berkeley

Karen Sloan, The Recorder

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Erwin Chemerinsky will be the next dean of the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.

The school announced Wednesday that Chemerinsky, a pre-eminent constitutional law expert and founding dean of the University of California, Irvine School of Law, will assume the deanship on July 1 for a five-year term.

He replaces Interim Dean Melissa Murray, who took that position in March 2016 after former Dean [Sujit Choudhry stepped down](#) amid a sexual harassment scandal.

“I feel so incredibly fortunate,” Chemerinsky said in an interview Wednesday. “I’ve had the most blessed career. Being at Irvine has been an amazing experience, and this is a wonderful new opportunity. Berkeley is a terrific law school and a great campus. I’m very committed to the public service mission of the University of California.”

Chemerinsky is one of the biggest names in the legal academy. He is among the most-cited legal scholars in the nation, the author of 10 books and nearly 200 law review articles, and he frequently appears in the opinion pages of major newspapers to offer commentary on the U.S. Supreme Court and significant legal issues.

“I believe he will be a phenomenal leader for our law school, someone who will ensure that Berkeley Law remains not only a powerhouse of legal scholarship and training, but also a community built on mutual respect and inclusion,” said U.C. Berkeley interim executive vice chancellor and provost Carol Christ in the announcement of Chemerinsky’s appointment.

Chemerinsky is perhaps best known in legal education circles for his audacious plan to launch a new public law school—what became U.C. Irvine School of Law—that would be in the top tier of U.S. News & World Report’s influential law school rankings. It was a goal many thought impossible given the entrenched nature of the rankings and law school prestige.

He was hired by U.C. Irvine administrators in 2007 to found the school. (His appointment hit a slight

delay when it was briefly rescinded over what former Chancellor Michael Drake deemed Chemerinsky's "polarizing" views.)

The school opened to students in 2009 and offered the entire inaugural class full-ride scholarships to bring in top applicants. It continued to subsidize tuition for the next several years. Irvine's momentum picked up in 2011 with provisional accreditation from the American Bar Association, followed by full accreditation in 2014

Irvine debuted on the [U.S. News rankings at No. 30](#), an unusually high position for new schools, and currently sits at No. 28.

"Beginning a law school at the start of the serious downturn in the legal market was tough," wrote Irvine law professor Richard Hasen on his [Election Law Blog](#). "No one knew how it would go. But Erwin, surrounding himself with excellent staff, and with great support from the chancellors and provosts of UCI, built UCI Law immediately into a world-class institution."

Samuel Sung Cheol Park, who just completed his second year at Irvine Law, said Wednesday that Chemerinsky has had an outsized impact on the law school. Beyond his top-notch scholarship, students appreciate Chemerinsky's accessibility, Park said.

"All of us at the law school know Dean Chemerinsky, and I'm pretty positive he knows all of us individually," Park said. "If you see him in the courtyard and approach him, he'll stay there and talk to you, which is fantastic because he's very busy with a lot of responsibilities."

Chemerinsky will have some work to do in restoring Berkeley Law's reputation following the Choudhry mess. Berkeley's U.S. News ranking dropped four spots to No. 12 this year—a decline Murray attributed to bad publicity surrounding Choudhry. He was accused of sexual harassment by his executive assistant, who later sued. The university [settled the case](#) in April, paying \$1.7 million to his accuser. Choudhry's employment at the law school is set to end in the spring of 2018.

Chemerinsky said in the announcement of his appointment that Berkeley, "should aspire to be one of the top five law schools in the country, by any and every measure."

If anyone can boost Berkeley's image, it's Chemerinsky, said Berkeley law professor Sonia Katyal. She said he's a "living legend—a person who exemplifies the very best that the field of law has to offer: brilliant, warm-hearted, thoughtful, open-minded, and deeply engaged in the culture of public service."

While at U.C. Irvine, Chemerinsky made no secret that he intended to step down after 10 years, in June 2018. The law school was already ramping up for a dean search, he said, but the offer of the Berkeley deanship accelerated his plans by a year.

Left on Chemerinsky's to-do list is raising the estimated \$85 million needed to build a new law building. (The school now operates out of space that was converted from a 24-hour gym.) U.C. Irvine Law announced Wednesday that professor L. Song Richardson, senior associate dean for academic affairs, will become interim dean.

Chemerinsky said that fundraising would be among his top priorities at Berkeley. California Gov.

Jerry Brown has implemented a tuition freeze for law students on University of California campuses that won't lift until 2020, Chemerinsky said, and the larger University of California, Berkeley campus is facing its own budget woes.

"Salaries, benefits and expenses have all gone up, but tuition revenue hasn't been able to go up," he said. "That, by itself, creates a budget problem."

Being able to tap into a network of 17,000 Berkeley Law alumni, as opposed to the 460 existing Irvine alumni who are all in the first decade of their legal careers, should aid the fundraising process, Chemerinsky said. He plans to travel the country to meet with alumni and discuss ways to boost their engagement with the school.

Contact the reporter at [ksloan@alm.com](mailto:ksloan@alm.com). On Twitter: @KarenSloanNLJ

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