

Tenure Professor Positions Being Eliminated from Vermont Law



Summary: *Vermont Law School is attempting additional changes to keep the law school alive by doing away with tenure professor positions.*

Vermont Law School has been undertaking a number of changes as the law school tries to stay afloat. The independent, freestanding law school known for its environmental law program is moving to get rid of tenure, according to Inside Higher Ed.

Generally tenure means a permanent position assuming there is no bad behavior or documented underperformances. Vermont Law is planning on moving some tenured professors to untenured positions. President Thomas McHenry said, “It is no secret that Vermont, like many institutions of higher education (and particularly law schools), has been facing considerable financial pressures for most of this decade.”

McHenry continued, “With unanimous support and guidance of our Board of Trustees, we are currently undergoing a process of programmatic restructuring; one that focuses on faculty and staff resources on our core educational goals and most essential and useful programs.”

The school is not sure how many of its 20 tenured professors will be affected by the changes. However, rumors reported by VT Digger estimate that over a dozen professors will lose tenure. Of the professors that remain with the school, they will be under contracts, much like how full-time, non-tenured professors are currently employed.

The law school is negotiating employment terms with faculty members this week before the end of the fiscal year on Friday. Those that reach agreements are asked to sign nondisclosure documents, preventing them from divulging the details.

Board of Trustees chair Colleen Connor, who is counsel at GE Power, said in a separate statement, “Recognizing that the future of law schools in the U.S. is changing, we have put our energies into working with the administration to design a model for the future of Vermont Law School that adapts to the changing market while continuing to deliver on our mission.”

The school has struggled to maintain its enrollment numbers, much like the rest of the country’s law schools. Enrollment has been seeing an increase in numbers this past year. Vermont Law is expecting 180 students this fall, which is full capacity for the school. They even had to use a waiting list this year for the first time in years.

Removing tenure allows for a school to terminate professors much easier than if they did have it. Vermont Law is likely opting for this option for the greater flexibility it brings should financial reasons arise for the school needing to easily reduce faculty numbers.

American Association of University Professors director of academic freedom and tenure Greg Scholtz questions how his change will align with American Bar Association standards on tenure. Current ABA standards require a law school to “afford to full-time clinical faculty members a form of security of position reasonably similar to tenure, and non-compensatory perquisites reasonably similar to those provided other full-time faculty members.” Further, law schools must have an “established and announced policy with respect to academic freedom and tenure.”

Despite these less favorable changes, the law school is holding events to continue promoting its excellence in environmental law. On July 12, the law school is holding a panel on how visual arts can advance the causes of environmental advocacy.

Perkins Coie partner and adjunct professor on ocean law and animal law, Don Baur, will moderate the panel. Baur said, “The power of visual media for driving an advocacy agenda has been demonstrated time and again across all fields of public policy and law. The speakers in this program have extraordinary backgrounds in a broad range of methods of visual communication, and they will share their work and experiences on how to advance environmental objectives through images and the messages they convey.”

Baur added, “We live in an age of social media, where policy and decisions at the highest level are driven by messages on Twitter. This program will serve as a forum for experts in visual communication to have an energetic discussion among themselves and with the audience on how advocacy goals can be advanced in this arena.”

To learn more about Vermont Law School, read these articles:

- [Vermont Law School Environmental Director Resigns](#)
- [Vermont Law School Expels Pesky Student](#)
- [Vermont Law Hosts "Hazing in Sports" Panel](#)

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