

# Renowned teacher and former dean retires

**A**fter more than 35 years of service to the law school, Cleveland Distinguished Chair of Legal Ethics & Professionalism and Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor C. Ronald Ellington retired June 1. Having served as both professor and dean, Ellington has played an integral part in shaping Georgia Law and has taught two generations of its alumni.

Ellington said he had known since his time in college that one day he wanted to teach in a university setting. So, after earning his law degree from the University of Virginia and practicing with Sutherland, Asbil & Brennan in Atlanta for three years, he accepted a job offer at Georgia Law and joined the faculty in 1969.

“I was immediately made to feel at home at Georgia. Ralph Beaird in particular was a mentor, although neither of us knew to call it that at the time,” Ellington said.

While originally teaching constitutional law and whatever other courses the law school asked him to, five years later, Ellington shifted his focus to the areas of civil procedure and Georgia practice. In 1974, he helped to

create Georgia Law’s original course materials for Georgia Practice and Procedure and began teaching both it and Civil Procedure regularly thereafter.

“I realized what terrific vehicles these classes could be to work through how lawyers conceive of and deal with problems,” Ellington explained. In fact, he said what he will miss the most is teaching first-year Civil Procedure.

“It is by far the most challenging job because you work with the same group of 1Ls from the first day of class in August to the end of the first year of law study. You see the most change and, I suppose, feel the most responsibility for getting them off to the right start,” Ellington said. “They will be expected, because of their training and roles as lawyers, to exercise good judgment, and that means to learn to think consequentially.”

In 1987, Ellington was chosen to serve as the law school’s ninth dean. Almost immediately after his appointment, the school faced a major financial crisis. In October of that year, the stock market crashed causing major losses in the school’s endowment hold-

ings, which severely reduced the spending allocations to support law school activities. Around the same time, state revenues also declined leading to significant budget reductions by the university.

“We continually operated against budget constraints with little margin for error,” Ellington explained.

Nevertheless, during his deanship Ellington helped to secure the public and private funding necessary to build Dean Rusk Hall. Student quality continued to rise yearly. The *Journal of Intellectual Property Law* was established and the faculty was bolstered through the hiring of several new talented members.

Ellington was also instrumental in helping to secure an increase to the law school’s base budget through the Board of Regents. As a result, when he stepped down from his post as dean to return to teaching full time in 1993, his successor, Edward D. “Ned” Spurgeon, found the school in good financial standing with the resources to continue to improve the law school’s programming.

In looking back over his years as dean, Ellington said he most enjoyed getting to know the school’s alumni.

“This law school is part of the fabric of this state, and one does come to appreciate that in a special way by serving as dean and spending time talking with alumni, old and new. You see what admission here means to students and their families and what the experience of studying law here has meant to the professional careers and lives of our graduates.”

Over the years, Ellington received numerous awards and honors for his work as an educator. In 2006, he was one of three professors campus-wide to be named a Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor, UGA’s highest honor for teaching excellence.

He has been presented with the Faculty



*Former Professor Bob Brussack (J.D.'76) presented Ron Ellington with the Distinguished Service Scroll Award in 1994, which is the Law School Association's highest honor for individuals whose dedication and service to the legal profession and the law school deserve special recognition.*



Ron Ellington joined the Georgia Law faculty as an assistant professor in 1969. After nearly four decades at the law school, he retired June 1.

From 1987 to 1993, Ellington served as dean of the law school.

He specialized in the areas of civil procedure, Georgia practice and procedure, complex litigation, and legal profession.

Book Award for Excellence in Teaching by Georgia Law students on four occasions and was honored by the renaming of the annual award to the C. Ronald Ellington Award for Excellence in Teaching during 2007. He has also received the Student Bar Association Professionalism Award eight times. In 1994, he served as a Senior Teaching Fellow at the university and, in 2000, he was inducted into the inaugural class of UGA's selective Teaching Academy.

"I hope that I have taught students how challenging legal problems can be when considered in all their dimensions and the importance of developing the habit of thorough preparation. Law study and law practice can be infinitely interesting and, hopefully, satisfying."

Throughout his teaching career, Ellington was also very active in the legal community. He served as a reporter/consultant for the State Bar of Georgia's Committee on Standards of the Profession and played a major role in the development and implementation of the State Bar's mentor/mentee program for newly admitted lawyers. This program is considered by other states as a model to implement.

He chaired the State Bar of Georgia Judicial Procedure and Administration Committee,

In 2006, Ellington was named a Meigs Professor, UGA's highest honor for teaching excellence. Photo by UGA Public Affairs' Dot Paul.

served on the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism for the first decade of its existence and helped lead the Joseph Henry Lumpkin American Inn of Court. Currently, Ellington is a member of the State Bar's Formal Advisory Opinion Board.

In 2007, the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association recognized Ellington for his contributions to the legal profession by awarding him their Lifetime Achievement Award.

Now that he is retired, Ellington said he will spend more time at his house in North Carolina enjoying the outdoors with his wife, Jeannie. However, he does plan to keep an office at the law school and teach Georgia Practice and Procedure during the spring semester for the next several years.

While having many wonderful memories of students and alumni, Ellington said his most vivid memory comes from a commencement ceremony during his tenure as dean.

"As the name of each graduate was called and he or she walked across the outdoor stage set under the trees in front of the law school that bright spring morning, I thought what a special place this is and how wonderful to be a part of this endeavor that so profoundly affects the lives of young people."

### Comments supporting Ellington's 2006 Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor Award nomination

"[Professor Ellington] possesses an indescribable passion for the subjects he teaches and conveys that passion in the classroom on a daily basis. He cannot hide it, and his students cannot help but appreciate it." – *Jessica M. Mallanda (J.D.'07)*

"He questioned with purpose, challenged without intimidating and probed without provoking. ... When one of us had that rare 'Eureka' moment, he was the first to express a satisfaction that bordered on glee." – *Wade H. "Trip" Tomlinson III (J.D.'87)*

"As a first-year law student, I walked into many classrooms fearing the professor's response if I answered a question incorrectly. In Professor Ellington's class the only fear I experienced was that of letting him down if I provided the wrong answer." – *Jonathan L. Greer (J.D.'06)*

"His students in [Georgia Practice and Procedure] consistently make the best trial and appellate lawyers because they come out of law school fully versed in the intricacies of the procedural aspects of Georgia law." – *Supreme Court of Georgia Justice George H. Carley (LL.B.'62)*

"In a real sense, the [State Bar of Georgia mentoring program] is 'the Ellington Plan,' for it epitomizes the lessons gleaned from his career devoted to living, loving, and teaching the rule of law and the values of the legal profession. ... When I see the variations in the education, training, skills, and values brought by applicants to the Bar Admissions process, it comforts me to know that the 'Ellington Plan' is in place, assuring a common approach to transitional education for newly admitted lawyers." – *State Bar of Georgia Director of Admissions Sally Evans Lockwood.*

