5 milestones, 1 celebration: ASU Law honors its past while planning for the future

Celebration marks 20 years since the college was named for Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, a decade in downtown Phoenix and other milestones

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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Story highlights

- ASU Law recently celebrated five milestones, including 20 years since the college was named for Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and a decade in the Beus Center for Law and Society on ASU’s downtown Phoenix campus.
- Scott O’Connor reflected on his mother’s energy, commitment to public service and pride in the law school that bears her name.
- Since moving to downtown Phoenix, ASU Law students have contributed more than 540,000 hours of pro bono service and completed or pursued 3,862 externships.

On Friday, ASU Law celebrated multiple milestones with a large and lively celebration that reflected on the legacy of its namesake, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, the college’s growth and its commitment to public service.

More than 200 people gathered at the Beus Center for Law and Society on Arizona State University's downtown Phoenix campus, where the law school is based, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the naming of the college and its first decade in the center.

"These anniversaries give us an opportunity to reflect on the people, partnerships and shared aspirations that have shaped ASU Law," said Angela Banks, interim dean of the school, "and to look ahead to what we can accomplish together."

In 1981, O'Connor became the first woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, and ASU was the first law school in the country to be named after a contemporary woman.

"Justice O'Connor's name has reminded us of the responsibility that comes with legal education — to serve others, strengthen our institutions and approach difficult questions with integrity, preparation and respect," said Banks, Charles J. Merriam Distinguished Professor of Law.

Banks announced the school's "remarkable new distinction of being ranked in the top 10 for law in the 2026 ShanghaiRanking."

"This recognition is a testament to the strength of our research, academic excellence and growing influence among the world's premier law schools," she said.

She also acknowledged Judge Redfield T. Baum's recent donation of $200,000 to endow the Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Chair and Rule of Law and Judicial Ethics at ASU Law.

"It brings us closer to creating an enduring home for the study and advancement of the principles that define Justice O'Connor's life and career, judicial integrity, ethical leadership and a steadfast commitment to the rule of law," she said.

At Friday's event, special guest Scott O'Connor, the son of the late justice, said his mother was very proud to have the law school named after her, adding that its energy matched hers.

"The law school's high energy and ambition, with so many clinics and specialty programs, demonstrates the same kind of energy Mom was legendary for," he said.

Both the school and Sandra Day O'Connor shared the same values as well.

"Mom always recognized public service as a career avenue for those who found fewer opportunities in the private sector, encouraging that path for women and minorities in particular," he said. "That was important to her. And then for those who did find success in the private sector, she would admonish them to share their talents via public and volunteer service in their professional lives. ASU Law School shares those values."

The naming of ASU Law was one of five milestones celebrated at the event.

The others were:

- 10 years in the Beus Center for Law and Society on ASU's downtown Phoenix campus

20 years of the Master of Legal Studies program, which recently added a specialized health care law master's degree

20 years of the Tribal Nations Policy Institute, which examines, explores and elevates the issues affecting American Indian and Alaska Native peoples

25 years of the Lodestar Dispute Resolution Center, a nationally recognized center of excellence in the field of dispute resolution

Former ASU Law Dean Douglas Sylvester was instrumental in the creation of the Beus Center for Law and Society. Sylvester thanked the many donors who helped make the $130 million Beus Center possible.

"We saw an opportunity to do something different," he said. "Traditionally, law schools had been self-contained academic communities. Students attended classes, professors taught and wrote and the outside world would occasionally come and visit.

"We wanted to turn that model on its head. We wanted to place ASU Law squarely in the legal, political, economic and civic center of Arizona. We wanted students to be just steps away from the courts, law firms, government offices and institutions where the law is practiced, debated and made."

The Beus Center has received major architectural honors, including Southwest Building of the Year, the AIA Arizona Distinguished Honor Award and LEED Gold certification.

On Friday evening, the walls of the building disappeared, allowing the large crowd to mingle outside while live music played in the background.

Sylvester noted that the architecture of the building reflects the philosophy behind it.

"Look around you — this open plaza, the transparent architecture," he said. "This is quite an engineering feat to have walls that disappear and let the city come in. And none of that was accidental. We wanted transparency, accessibility and engagement to be more than words in a mission statement. We wanted them built into the architecture."

During Banks' closing remarks, she recognized the many ways in which the school is helping students, and the students, in turn, are serving the community.

Since moving to downtown Phoenix 10 years ago, ASU Law students have:

Contributed more than 540,000 hours of pro bono legal service.

Completed or are on track to complete 3,862 externships — an average of more than 500 per year — learning alongside practitioners and contributing to the work of courts, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and other employers.

“But behind those numbers are people, individuals and families navigating legal challenges and counting on someone to help them find a path forward, attorneys taking time to mentor a student, students discovering where their talents and sense of purpose can lead them,” Banks said. “That is what our mission looks like in practice. As we look ahead, our responsibility is to build on that foundation. We must continue preparing students to exercise sound judgment in a changing world, to understand the law, ask thoughtful questions, listen carefully and lead with integrity.

“Justice O'Connor's example will remain central to that work. Her commitment to public service, civic participation and the rule of law offers a lasting guide for how we educate and how we engage with the world around us. We honor her legacy through the choices we make, the opportunities we open, the service we provide and the care with which we prepare the next generation of lawyers. Twenty years after taking her name and 10 years after opening the doors to this building, we have much to celebrate, and we also have much to do.

“Our task now is to carry that work forward with ambition, purpose and a clear commitment to the people we serve.”

This story originally appeared on ASU News.

Main image



Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's legacy was honored Friday at an event celebrating five milestones of the law school that bears her name, including 20 years since the college was named for her and a decade in the Beus Center for Law and Society on ASU’s downtown Phoenix campus. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



Scott O’Connor, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s son, reflected on his mother's enduring legacy of public service, civic engagement and leadership at an event Friday, Oct. 23, celebrating a number of milestones for ASU Law. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Former ASU Law Dean Douglas Sylvester spoke at Friday's event. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



ASU Law Interim Dean Angela M. Banks gives her closing remarks at Friday's event. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News